PARTRIDGE FARMING FOR THE SMALL SHOOT by Nigel Gray

The SHOOTING TIMES
and Country Magazine

SEVENTY-FIFTH YEAR FRIDAY, JANUARY 25th, 1957 1s. 3d. WEEKLY

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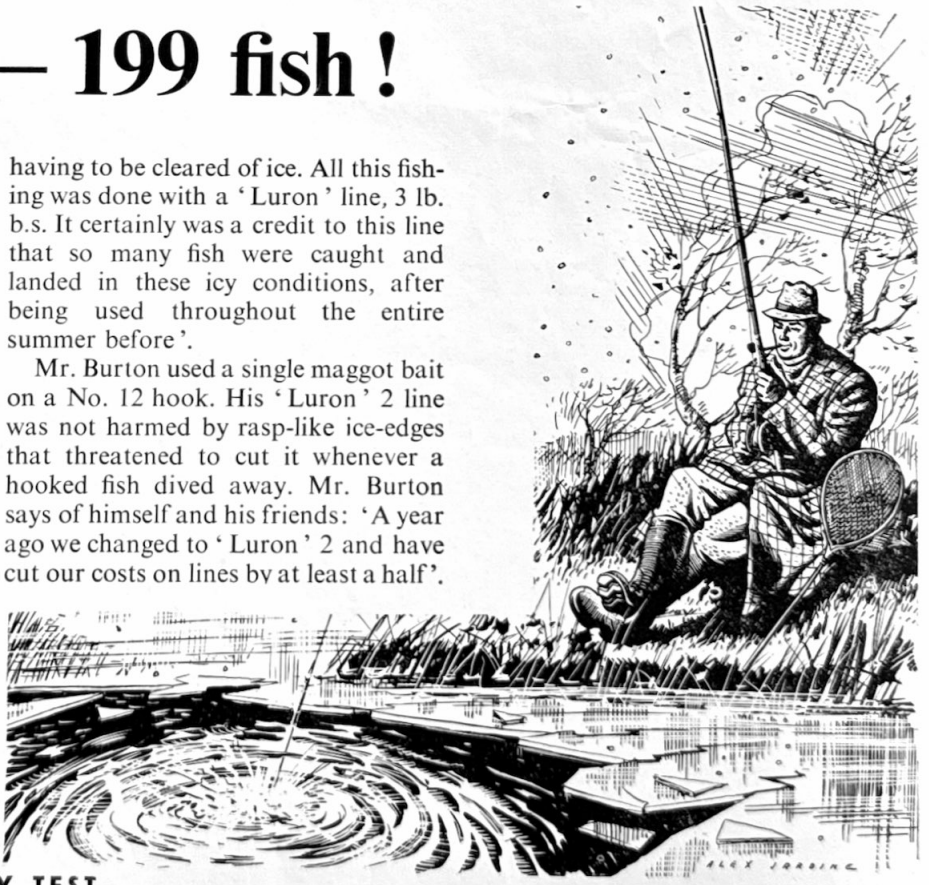
MR. G. C. BURTON of 135, Boothferry Road, Hessle, East Yorks., winner of a Sunday Express prize, caught 199 fish on two successive outings in February 1956! Fishing through a hole in the ice on Hornsea Mere, Eskimo fashion, Mr. Burton caught 72 roach on 6th February and 119 roach and 8 perch on 14th February.

'Conditions were very, very cold' says Mr. Burton. 'On the second occasion there was ice an inch thick on the whole of the mere. I broke a hole about 10 yds. across and started to fish. The lines and rod eyes were constantly having to be cleared of ice. All this fishing was done with a 'Luron' line, 3 lb. b.s. It certainly was a credit to this line that so many fish were caught and landed in these icy conditions, after being used throughout the entire summer before'.

Mr. Burton used a single maggot bait on a No. 12 hook. His 'Luron' 2 line was not harmed by rasp-like ice-edges that threatened to cut it whenever a hooked fish dived away. Mr. Burton says of himself and his friends: 'A year ago we changed to 'Luron' 2 and have cut our costs on lines by at least a half'.



Well done, Mr. Burton!
Well done,

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SALMON STOCKS

A FEW rivers in England and Scotland are already open to salmon fishing, and the statutory opening day is a week hence. Details of the dates for some of the more important rivers were given in "Fisherman's Diary" last week, but it may not be out of place now to make some general observations on the subject of salmon and salmon fishing.

There appears to be a general impression that salmon fishing is not as good as it used to be, but that is said of many other things besides salmon fishing and the arguments are usually frustrated by statistics and patient investigators. Obviously polluted rivers and those whose estuaries are polluted are not going to have a run of salmon. From that point of view salmon fishing is certainly not what it once was; but in rivers in which salmon still run the question is debatable.

The actual take is a poor guide, and the matter can be fairly judged only where it is possible to count the fish that ascend the river. Efforts of the most diverse description are being taken by River Boards to increase the stocks, and in spite of all that is said of netsmen by anglers, the former are stiffly regulated in most areas.

Salmon are not merely an angler's pastime. They are an important source of food, and form the sole livelihood of a considerable number of people. It is in the interests of all that stocks should be preserved and increased, and there is fair evidence that this is being done.

One must view the matter of nets and rods objectively. Salmon are in demand as food. This country imports salmon from the Irish Republic and Scandinavia, and the home supply simply cannot be relegated entirely to sporting purposes. One cannot be blind to the fact either, that sportsmanship in salmon fishing is in a very great many cases overlaid by commercialism. There are still many anglers who fish for salmon for a few days or a week with no thought of anything but sport. There are far more who look to the catch to pay the cost of their licence and holiday. There are a few who go still further and pay the high cost of renting a good Scottish river or stretch of river with the sole intention of making a substantial profit on the deal.

This brings up the point of the price of salmon. It has been argued that because salmon were sold at 3d. or 4d. a pound in such places as Cornwall or Westmorland on occasions between 1750 and 1850, salmon were then more plentiful. Those prices obtained when there was an influx of salmon to an area that poor communications deprived of a market. There were occasions in those hundred years when the London price of salmon was 8s. or 9s.—which meant far more than the top price of salmon today.

In rivers that have suffered no interference—the Corrib, for example—salmon run as well as they ever did. Given a fair chance the fish will do all that is required of them. Neither nets nor rods interfere with their continued existence in anything like the measure exercised by pollution in all its forms. Once the rivers are clean the salmon will do the rest.

THE SHOOTING TIMES AND COUNTRY MAGAZINE

Official Organ of
THE WILDFOWLERS' ASSOCIATION
OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND

No. 3881 FRIDAY, JANUARY 25, 1957 Founded in 1882

The wild life of today is not ours to dispose of as we please. We have it in trust. We must account for it to those who come after.—King George VI.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Field Sports P.R.O.

All those who have shown concern at the constantly recurring anti-sport propaganda put out by certain sections of the daily Press and the absence of retaliation by the British Field Sports Society, will be pleased to learn that on January 1 the Society appointed a leading London public relations organisation, whose job it will be to defend, and at the same time promote in every possible way, British field sports, and, in particular hunting in its various forms.

I understand from the Secretary that it is intended that the energies of the Society for the next two or three years should be directed towards:

1. Recruitment of members.
2. A public relations "build-up" of the British Field Sports Society.
3. An intensified programme of news dissemination on field sports, with particular reference to hunting.

POLICE NOTICE

To All Gunsmiths and Firearms Dealers

A case has recently occurred where a criminal was able to walk into a gunsmith's, go to the cellar, steal a revolver and ammunition and walk out without being observed.

Scotland Yard has requested your co-operation to tighten security measures at your premises to prevent a repetition.

I am confident that readers of this and allied journals will focus maximum attention on the Society's activities in the coming year, and thereby bring them to the attention of all who are interested in the preservation of field sports.

Situation Vacant

Applications are invited for the position of Honorary Secretary of the Wildfowlers' Association of Great Britain and Ireland, which will become vacant on March 16 due to the retirement of the present secretary. Anyone wishing to apply for the appointment should write to the Chairman of the Executive Committee, E. L. Parish, M.B.E., Oaktree Cottage, Hillcrest Gardens, Hinchley Wood, Surrey.

This formal announcement hides the unhappy news that for health reasons Brigadier G. D. Holmes is forced to resign the office which he has so ably held for the last two years.

In that time, due very largely to his energy and enthusiasm W.A.G.B.I. has prospered and, indeed, by stimulating the formation of so many more affiliated clubs and visiting them personally, Brigadier Holmes has now increased his successor's "round" to such an extent that clubs must naturally not expect so many personal visits from the secretary in the future.

I know I speak for all members of the Association when I thank Dickie Holmes for his hard and successful work on our behalf, and wish him a speedy return to full health. He has set his successor a high standard.

Pigeon Punishment

Mr. Peter Page, Secretary of the Clay Pigeon Shooting Association, has sent me the following pigeon punishing news.

Mr. E. W. Ward, of Stableford, Bridgnorth, holder of the Shropshire Sporting Clay Bird Championship, was called to the Cotwall Farm of Mr. Bruckshaw to deal with pigeon on a 40-acre barley stubble field. In four days' shooting he killed 770 birds, averaging a three to four hour visit each time. In between times he shot 310 pigeon in four hours at the farm of Mr. G. Bradburn, of Chesterton, on a day when three other guns brought the total to 540.

Cover Picture

There can be few, I feel, who will fail to appreciate our cover picture this week. There will also, I believe, be many who, as I was myself, are at first somewhat sceptical about the "genuineness" of the scene. For their benefit let me explain that the partridges are some of the birds hand-reared by Mr. Douglas England (who took the photograph) at his Wokingham game farm. He tells me that he can approach really close to them and that this photograph, enlarged and coloured by himself proved a very popular Christmas card.

I will, however, let readers into one secret. The original photographic background was somewhat "straggly and dull" and Mr. England exercised his artistic ingenuity in improving it.

As he himself asks, I wonder who would have guessed it?

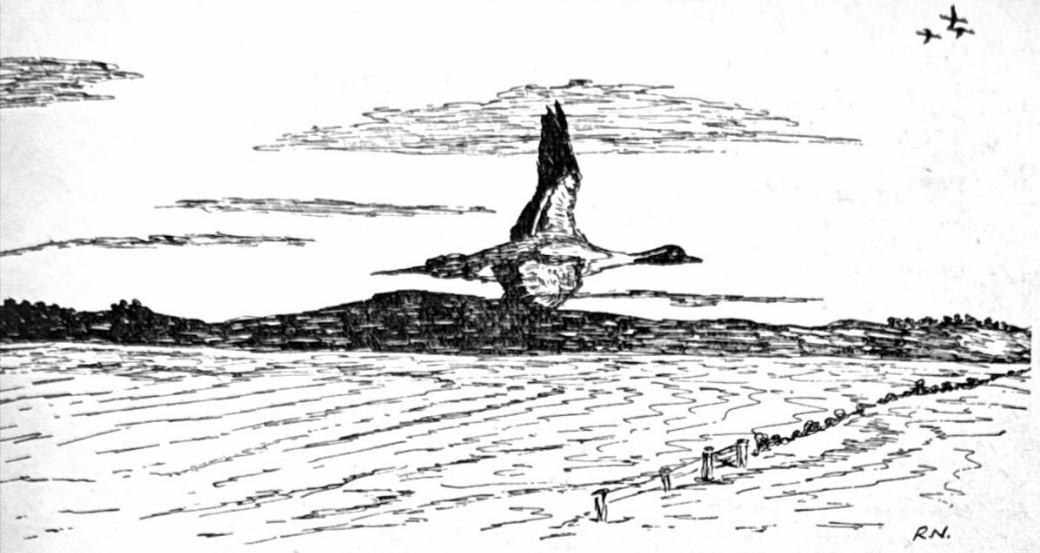
Last week's cover was also by Douglas England.

It's My Delight

A Midland reader tells me that a shooting friend received an unusual and not altogether welcome present on Christmas morning. A neatly wrapped parcel arrived by post bearing a "Best Christmas Wishes" label. When the paper was removed there came to light a box containing 25 fired .410 cartridge cases and a well-drawn woodland scene by moonlight depicting cock pheasants at roost and a man with a gun.

The inscription read, "From the Poachers."

AUCEPS.



A pintail speeds down-wind over the flooded marsh.

NEW YEAR SNAP-SHOTS

by Tower-Bird

WITH only two week-ends of 1957 behind us, I am, nevertheless, able to look back on them with very real pleasure, for they produced quite a number of small though colourful incidents worthy of storing in mind, or recording in brief on this page.

Round about Christmas-time I was unfortunate enough, or foolish enough, during evening flight to leave my telescope in a rough hide I had made on a narrow island. On that evening of gale and driving rain I did not fire a shot, but I now remember taking off my telescope and gamebag while I fetched brushwood and reeds to form my hide, and I evidently forgot under the circumstances to pick up the glass. I did not miss it until two days later, when I went to fetch it to examine the floods which had risen within a comparatively few hours to their record height of last year. When I could not find it, I was forced to assume that it was under 10 feet or more of water, and that I could say "good-bye" to it, for a small river was now washing over the island where I had left it.

On January 4, when the higher points of ground began to show above the surface of the floods, I set out in a light boat, in the teeth of a high wind, for the island, and, for reasons which I will not enter into here, I was sitting on an empty beer-crate right up in the bows. Maybe I did not give matters the thought they deserved, but certainly I *should* have realised that this very light craft, with 12½ stone right up in the bows was sure to ship water as we fought our way through the waves. Half-a-mile from shore, and near the island, I began to wonder what was happening, for the wind seemed to be punching hard at the boat—much sharper and harder than wind should punch. Even then, I did not realise that the boat was gradually filling under my seat, but when she suddenly shipped water in the grand manner, and it swirled in, and the craft turned slowly over, it began to dawn on me that all was not well.

A Second Ducking

In 15 feet of water I fell sideways and made a grab at the bank, and another grab at the water-horse. My sea-boots filled and my heavy clothes pulled at me, but I was able to clamber ashore, pull up the craft, empty her, and examine her bottom, for I believed that she had sprung a leak. I then spent twenty shivering minutes searching for the telescope, and, dragging near where the hide had been with a crooked stick, I eventually discovered that the glass had been washed off the steep bank, but the strap had caught in some obstacle, and now my stick had "landed" it. Nothing could have been so lucky! For some minutes I sat in the boat waiting for water to come in, but she kept dry, and off we went across-wind through deep floods. Right in the centre of the sheet of water the boat filled again, and again tipped me out, but here I could just touch bottom with my toes. Eventually, I managed to guide the craft to a tiny island and empty her, and it was there that realisation of the cause of the trouble dawned, so that, shifting the crate from the bows, I rowed home without further incident.

Flight Under Difficulties

Soon after this, my partner and I had a really first-class evening flight; albeit, I would rather not give kills to cartridges. All afternoon the rain drove across the marshes which were veiled in mist, and the wind was mighty strong. We stood before and at dusk on a narrow strip of ground between two deep channels, and so narrow was the strip that I, for one, was well aware that I was missing far and away too often mainly because I felt almost giddy as I stood on this almost plank-like strip and the wind tore at me every time I rose to shoot, for the place was devoid of cover and we were nearly knee-deep in water. To me, it was like raising the gun and shooting at an overhead bird while standing on the edge of a high building in a gale.

My companion said that this aspect did not worry him, and he could not account for the bad shooting. But the duck were almost pouring towards us across the misty floods, curling as they changed direction from across-wind to down-wind. They came like bullets, and those we did kill were carried far away on to the floods behind. On the following day my partner's son joined us, and again we all shot very badly indeed, though there was no lack of opportunity.

The most outstanding picture of the New Year however came the following week-end, when we took with us to a certain place that fiery Dane, "Sig." Bjornsen, secretary of the Chichester Harbour Wildfowlers' Association. That day, we shot pheasants, and a score of pigeon (then deciding to waste no more time on the latter, as the cartridges might be more usefully expended on duck), and finally continued to this "certain place" for afternoon and evening flight. We were not then aware of the state of the floods, or we should certainly have carried to the scene the boat and dozen decoys we left in the car a mile away. But on arriving at our "stands" we realised that circumstances cried allowed for boat and decoys, but we kidded ourselves (being lazy, happy-go-lucky fellows) that, if we fetched the craft and decoys there would probably be no duck flighting.

A Sight for the Gods

Hardly, however, had we taken up our positions when something disturbed the duck already on the great marsh, and soon the air seemed full of little parties of mallard, wigeon, teal, and Canada geese. But let the afternoon go by, and let us look at the time when a grand sunset lit the high hills in the distance with fire and colour which were reflected in miles of still flood-water. It was then that the wigeon began to arrive in great and lesser companies, and they came straight towards us, dropping down from a good height to almost water-level. As we hugged each his own gate-post, I passed along the word: "Let them come in; don't shoot until they are well within range." Round and round they flew, rising and diving, whistling and chirruping, no less than two thousand wigeon, apart from teal and a few small lots of mallard. Round and round and round they came again and again. Ten yards nearer and we could all shoot, knowing them to be well within range.

Yet I fancy they were suspicious of the dark smudge which was half my black labrador (the other half was under a camouflaged gas-cape). At all events, a single wigeon went down wide of us on the flood, and two battalions followed it down. And there they sat and swam within a hundred and fifty yards of us. Presently, a shot (fired purposely) caused them to rise with a roar of wings and a mighty twittering, and to make off, though some swung round and came low right over us. As long as I live I shall remember that marvellous scene—the high hills lit by a sinking sun and duplicated, their light and shadows, in the great expanse of mirror-like water. And over the water the circling, swinging companies of our favourite duck, with black Vs and lines of other fowl etched against the background of sky above the hills and the more gentle wooded slopes to the north. A silver, near-full moon turning to gold and taking over from the vanished sun. The continual whistle of the racing wigeon companies overhead, invisible against the clear, star-studded dome; the faint chattering of mallard passing over up there among them.

As we sat by the fire of the little inn that night it was impossible not to refer every now and again to the scenes and events of that afternoon, even though I was busy learning from the crafty Dane how he and his compatriots "get out" at dominoes. I must admit that it is a better method than ours, this ending to "threes and fives," but it cost this Britisher and his companion several pints of good ale straight from the wood ere we had learned our lesson!

Two more small incidents of the first fortnight of the glad New Year will also stick in my memory. The first concerned a running pheasant I had down, and which Don could not find in a jungle of swamp. The bird had gone a full twenty minutes or more when my shooting companion put his dog into cover. The old dog, Pete by name, a good pheasant hound of ten winters, slow and expressionless (except on those rare occasions when he grins)

(Continued on page 72, col. 3)

Partridge Farming for the Small Shoot

by Nigel Gray

DURING the last five years, the I.C.I. Game Research Station have gained sufficient experience with hand-reared birds to establish an experimental partridge farm at Fordingbridge. The principle of this is to produce eggs from penned birds much as we do with pheasants. In 1956 our production was over 2,000 partridge eggs, all of which, I hasten to say, were hatched here to carry out further trials in incubation, rearing, marking, releasing, etc. As yet efficient large scale partridge farming is only practical for the big shoot or game farmer.

Briefly, it works as follows, starting from scratch :

1. Pick up, say, 200 early partridge eggs from wild nests (the robbed hen will re-nest if the clutch is taken before she starts to sit).
2. From these rear about 100 birds.
3. In October sex the birds and place cocks and hens in different pens.
4. During the winter start moving the cock and hen pens apart until in March the two lots of pens are about 100 yards from each other.
5. The first fine day in March put each hen in a separate pen followed two hours later by a cock.
6. Starting with 100 birds the previous September you should have, by now, 40/45 pairs.
7. From mid-April onwards these pairs should lay about 1,000 eggs.

Put briefly like that it sounds simple enough, but as the old saying goes : " There's many a slip ' twixt cup and lip '."

Discussing this with the Editor of the *Shooting Times* he said " That's all right for the big boys, but what about the chap with a rough shoot of 3/400 acres and no keeper ? Can't you help him ? "

I think I probably can, but whoever tries it must be an enthusiast, and it is because I know that there are a large number of enthusiasts about that I am going to set out a small-scale programme which could give good results.

At the Game Research Station we know of partridges being reared in surprisingly " rough " conditions; in an inn yard; on old tennis lawns; in town gardens, etc. One of our own chaps reared two pens of partridges in his garden to act as photographic models, with the assistance of his wife and five-year-old son—and got 80 per cent survival. So first of all arm yourself with the following booklets—" Partridge Rearing " No. 4 and " Hatching Game Birds' Eggs " No. 11 (available free from I.C.I. Game Research Station, Fordingbridge, Hants.). Study these carefully, but do not be put off by the seeming complications. If you want the best results the routine set out should be followed implicitly, but if you are prepared to take a chance a few short cuts can be introduced, particularly over feeding times.

Factors To Consider

Deciding on how many you are going to rear depends on a number of factors, and in particular how many eggs you can pick up, but I would suggest no more than two pens to start with. For these you will need 30 eggs. As you will see later there is a possibility in these small numbers of subsequently getting brother and sister mating, so you should try to get your eggs from as many clutches as possible—one each from 30 nests is of course impractical, but a bit of swopping with a keeper friend would go a long way to solving the problem.

It is probably best to leave the eggs in the nests as long as possible, but in any case when you do pick them up store them carefully *on damp sand in a cool place*, turning each day. Be *very gentle* in handling them and do not store them for more than 10/12 days. The type of pen used is described fully in the partridge rearing leaflet, and if you cannot afford to buy the excellent manufactured type, a little ingenuity with wire netting, nails, old teachests, good ale and bad language, and you can make a fair substitute.

Assuming you have had reasonable luck with hatching and rearing the birds, you ought to have 12/18 left at six weeks. Let us look on the black side and say 12. You are now faced with the problem of " storing " the birds for the winter. After six weeks they are not too difficult, however, and need less moving, but if you have reared them at home on a very small piece of ground you will probably have to move them down to the shoot. If this is just one farm and only visited by you at week-ends the help of the farmer or one of his men will be needed. Instead of feeding them twice a day from now on you could probably manage with a home-made self-feed hopper (or standard chicken type) topped up with mixed grain and poultry crumbs every so often (the bigger the hopper the less often).

Moving On To Fresh Ground

Moving on to fresh ground each week-end would be adequate, and you could possibly come back on to the original ground after a month providing you had no trouble with disease. At a pinch you could get along with a piece of land about six times the size of the two pens, i.e. 60 feet by 10 feet. Your next activity will be sexing the birds. This is easily done at 14/15 weeks, but to be quite sure, leave it until the end of October. You will find leaflet No. 9, "How to Distinguish Sex and Age in Partridges" useful for this job.

From now onwards the most likely trouble will be fighting, particularly amongst the hens, and a small isolation pen about five feet square would be handy for any birds that get knocked about. About December start moving the pens apart until the cocks and hens are as far away from each other as possible. By March 1st you should have enough birds surviving to make up four or five pairs. Again looking on the black side, let's say four pairs, which means you will have to buy or make two more pens to accommodate them.

The first fine day in March take your hens and put one in each of the four pens. Keep the cocks for a couple of hours in a big hamper (borrowed for the occasion) and then put one to each hen. Sacks can be used, but beware of the very closely woven type as you may suffocate the birds. It is rare to get a failure with this pairing method if it is properly carried out. With the 48 pairs at our Game Farm last year we only had one " divorce." It is fairly obvious when this happens because the hen usually " takes the rolling pin " to her enforced mate and knocks the stuffing out of him.

The Biggest Snag

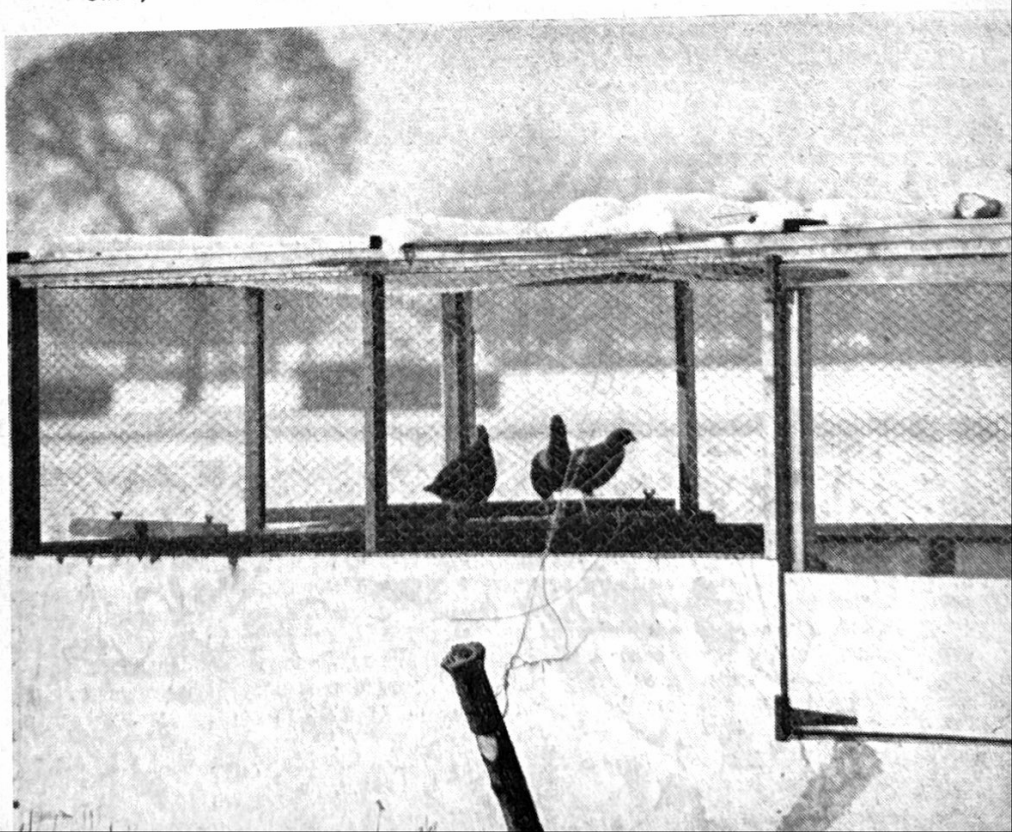
Again assuming bad luck, you may now be reduced to three pairs. If you originally picked up " mixed " eggs there will be no possibility of brother and sister mating. Continue to move the pens about once every 10 days.

From now on occurs the biggest snag where small numbers of pairs are concerned. Penned pairs vary enormously with the date of their first egg. The first pair to lay usually starts around the middle of April, but the last pair may not start until mid-May. This may mean that your first batch of eggs have to be set five weeks before the last batch. You could get over this by swopping your early eggs in wild nests. This is complicated even for a full-time keeper, but an enthusiast can use his ingenuity and have a try. Supposing, however, your pairs are kind to you and all start laying within a week, you ought to average about one egg every other day from each pair and if you go on collecting eggs for 30 days after the start of laying you should get two batches of about 45 eggs.

At this stage you could stop moving the pen, make a small scrape in a corner and keep putting the eggs in as the bird lays. After a while she will continue to lay in the nest and with a bit of luck go down on the eggs. When she hatches release her with her mate and brood to take their chance with the summer weather. With the 45 eggs you could rear a few more than the previous year. You might even rob a wild nest

(Continued on page 75, col. 3)

One of the winter partridge pens on the I.C.I. game research station at Fordingbridge.



GREAT MORNING

by BB

WHAT a jumble of memories remain after a wildfowling expedition. How difficult it is to keep track of the days, the dawn and evening flights. So to my journal I turn and one by one pictures spring back into the mind as I read the entries there.

Always, each day, the sun shone, the good earth rang with frost, the white-clad mountains dominated the green valleys, the darkling peat hags, which lay between the mountains and the sea.

Early in January Tom had his first goose, shot on flight as all geese should be shot and therefore worth two of mine on the fields. And later that morning the Doctor had a chance of a stalk inland. A large party of pinks were feeding well in to a fence on land owned by our friend. There was a dyke handy, fairly deep and thick with reed, and it looked an easy stalk. Tom and I waited in the van watching through our glasses. The geese fed unconcernedly, none was suspicious, and as the minutes ticked away our excitement grew.

There was no sign from the dyke, no reed shook. A hare sat up in the sun and washed his whiskers, grey wood-pigeons (there were countless thousands in the Highlands that winter), went nodding and waddling close to the dyke edge. Surely Mike must be opposite them now! The geese feed on. A yellowhammer came and hopped about among the bare thorns close to the van. Then, in an instant, grey wings open, a hundred grey cloaks are spread, the clamour of the rising geese smites the ear.

Yet no grey shapes slump to earth! The skein climbs and is away, and from the dyke arises the rueful Mike. Just one of those things. Perhaps he forgot the maxim of holding high; perhaps the pattern was ragged. Mike had yet to shoot his goose. Our range was widened. Somewhere the geese must be, north, south, east or west, who could tell?

The Grey Legions

At last we found them. We found them in a sheltered strathe where the swift and treacherous river, famous for its fish, flows into the western sea. There were the grey legions sitting in the sun. There they splashed happily in the shining river in company with painted wigeon. Others winged slowly along, their shadows below them on the sweet green grass. There, too, were the majestic whoopers, black of leg and graceful in carriage, and far more regal birds than the vain mute swan. In the pale sunlight their top heavy heads and canary yellow bills were clearly visible. Worthy game to the wildfowler, perhaps, in days gone by, but now on the protected list. I have never shot a wild swan. I thought that perhaps I might do so if the law allowed, if I encountered these noble fowl in wilder and more unapproachable surroundings.

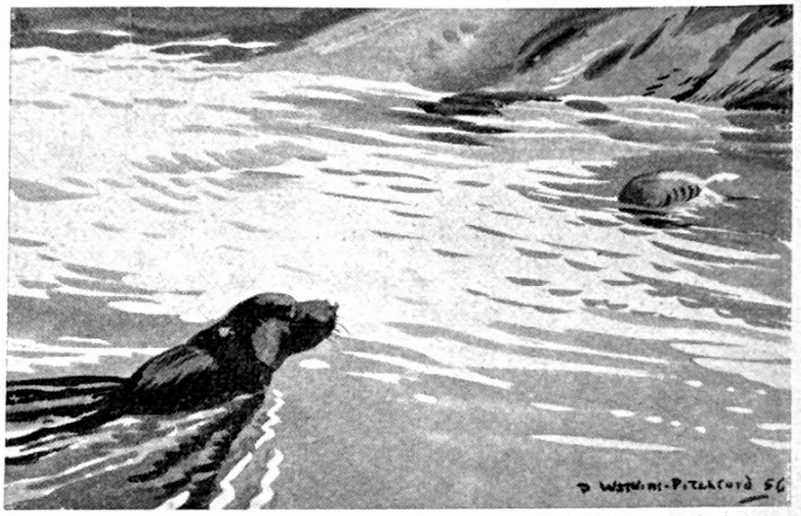
But we had to be content with bird-watching that morning. There was no chance of getting permission to try for the geese; the ground was rigidly preserved, and goose shooting was "taboo."

Yet perhaps higher up this valley on the other side of the river the mighty laird held no sway? It was worth a trial. And so we crossed that river under the blue mountains and found a farmer who said "yea" and not "nay."

If geese were on the laird's policies they might come here. It was good goose ground; there was ample sign of that in the rolled green droppings along the river.

At five-thirty next morning the alarm clock bade us be up and doing, Mike, Tom, and I, and three eager dogs. It was still dark when we reached the river valley, but we had already, in broad day, chosen and made our hides, as all good wildfowlers should. Too often have we been caught out in this way, to arrive in the dark, on unknown ground, and had to construct in, say, twenty minutes, a sound hide. This just cannot be done.

Though I say it myself, I think I had chosen my hide wisely. There was a fence, a little burn, shingle, and a pile of driftwood. Heaped carelessly against the end of the fence what goose could ever mistake it for a hide? True, I was somewhat cramped, especially when Mick my hefty labrador was to be my bedfellow. But at least I could stand up and shoot and that, my masters, believe me, is the whole essence of good shooting on the coast and indeed anywhere.



Mick swims out to retrieve a goose from the river.

Tom built a hide along the far fence, too conspicuous as he afterwards owned. Mike went downriver from me and utilized a fallen tree.

Tardily came the dawn and with it the glad chiming of many geese. From the western sky and the shining sea the serried lines hove in sight.

Shut Up Like a Book

My first chance came when a single bird flew over, half-seen against the sky above me. It was a glorious shot. The goose shut up like a book and hit the very centre of the river sending up a column of spray as from a six-inch shell.

"Hie lost!" I breathed in Mick's ear. He is rock steady on all game and was poised like a marathon runner. Away he went under the wire, over the shingle, and breasted the surging flood. A few minutes later his black shape with the goose in his mouth appeared along the bank racing towards me.

What a grand dog! The best I ever owned, grandson of a famous bitch which was sold abroad for a record price, a sombre, brooding dog, full of secret sorrows, a "one man" dog, undemonstrative, with the pluck of a lion in water.

He shows little excitement or satisfaction in his work which he does so perfectly. Cold efficiency, that's Mick, yet he adds so much joy to my fowling. He wears the air of a dog who has been through much privation and has suffered at man's hands. It may be so, but now, at least, he never suffers under mine.

Again I shoot; again a goose drops, this time to my left, beyond invisible Tom, down on the grass by the river. Mick leaps the wire and the darkness swallows him for the dawn has not yet come with any brightness.

Time For Breakfast

Then the Doctor shoots. I hear a thump on the far bank of the river and I hear him whistle for my dog. But other geese are coming, and the pick-up must wait.

Two more geese fall to me, another to the Doctor, and one to Tom before the flight was over. Then, when it was fully light, and something told us it was time for breakfast I strolled along to Mike to see where his goose had fallen.

Through the glasses we could see it, tucked up in a red cranny of earth over the far side. Another foot this way and the river would have swept it from our ken. A word to Mick and he was out and over, being swept far down before he could land and race up the far bank to the fallen bird.

He picked it up and plunged manfully in, the current whipping him downstream so that his round, shining, seal-like head vanished and only the top of the goose was visible where the current was strongest. Eight geese were in the bag that morning, a satisfactory total indeed, and the hard-boiled eggs and hot coffee seemed to go down extremely well as we leant against the river fence watching the first snow flakes fall.

But over our brightness and satisfaction a small shadow came stealing. This shadow was in the guise of a distant figure which was bearing down upon us along the river's edge, a figure which to me seemed full of foreboding for he carried a gun and two black labradors were at his heel.

This was no farmer, there was an air of purpose about that figure. It did not run, it did not stride, but it moved with confidence, with an air of cutting off all retreat.

Yet why should we be apprehensive? The farmer had bade us shoot the geese. Yet, I felt uneasy! Our visitor came sturdily through the icy burn. The water took him to his knees, but he did not flinch.

I saw the humour of the situation. I was reminded of four dogs, strangers, meeting, the one dog on his own ground, the others trespassers. Metaphorically speaking we walked stiffly round each other with hackles up and forelegs a-tremble. Yes—indeed—a delicate situation!

It transpired that this was the shooting tenant, we were trespassing on his ground. He had a right to be annoyed, very annoyed, but he showed admirable restraint. By degrees hackles were lowered, and when we explained that we were entirely the innocent party, all was well—indeed, this distinguished gentleman said we might come again in two days time

(Continued on page 75, col. 3)

The skin of this stoat, shot at close quarters, would not be worth half-a-crown.

Round the Game Preserves

by David Imrie

DURING the first two months of the year when the pelts of wild animals in this country are at their best, gamekeepers and other trappers are often able to augment their incomes a little by skinning their vermin victims. At no time are they able to compete with professional trappers of the sub-Arctic regions, of course, because we have no animals which carry very valuable pelts ; but it is surprising nevertheless how much money can be made in this fashion by men who are prepared to go to some trouble. The skins of most fur-bearing animals have usually to be stretched carefully and dried thoroughly before they are saleable ; but the rabbit's coat is an exception. It need only be pulled off and dried ; for this is the raw material of felt hats. I must also add that some merchants will accept skins of certain animals wet, if they are despatched immediately.

Despite the scarcity of rabbit skins at the moment, it is rather strange that they do not command a bigger price. One firm, noted for generous dealing, offers one shilling each for items of good quality, which is less than they offered a few years ago. Small skins are worth only half that figure ; so one is apt to suspect that they are able to import their raw material from abroad. It is probable, however, that someone may be able to point out advertisements that offer more attractive prices ; but whether they are ever paid is another matter. There are skin merchants who make impressive offers which they pay only in exceptional circumstances. For instance, I knew one firm which announced that they would pay 2s. each for rabbit skins a few years ago, although they never gave this price for ordinary skins, nor even half of it. Being manufacturing furriers, they gave the highest sum only for special pelts, probably from tame rabbits, after they had been thoroughly stretched.

Something For Nothing

In the remote past I used to hear of firms that occasionally paid nothing for a trapper's consignment. If they were called in question, they replied that the skins had arrived in a tainted condition, and had to be destroyed. No doubt, this was true in many cases ; for some trappers are careless with their drying arrangements. In other cases, however, one is apt to think that these firms were not all that they might have been. But one trapper, whom I heard about, apparently managed to get satisfaction by a ruse. He waited a reasonable time for the cash to turn up for a parcel of small skins, then he wrote for a quotation for a consignment of deer skins, and at the same time casually mentioned that he had not received a return for the first lot. Without delay he got his money, and that was the end of his dealings with the firm. He had no deer skins, nor had he the slightest possibility of getting any !

Bad For Business

It is hardly necessary to point out that skin merchants who practically never pay their top advertised prices, or who are too ready to down-grade every consignment are not likely to build up a flourishing business. Rather than have repeated disappointments most trappers prefer to send their skins to firms which have a reputation for scrupulously fair dealing, even if they do not offer alluring prices. It may happen often, of course, that firms which advertise high prices actually pay much the same as the less spectacular advertisers ; but the fact that they raise hopes, then dash them to the ground, is enough for a great many sellers.

On the other hand, most skin merchants who advertise in national papers will pay more than local dealers, who are, after all, only middle men, and out for the biggest rake off for themselves, so long as they do not spoil their trade. The least profitable dealer, as far as the seller is concerned, is the gipsy type who gives little or nothing for skins. But he flourishes nevertheless, because he contacts people who have only a few skins in their possession at a time. The professional trapper seldom, if ever, deals with these itinerant merchants, although he may have pressure put on him to do so. He will be assured that the gipsy's price is the utmost that can be got anywhere for the same goods, and that a deal will save the trapper the trouble of drying the skins and paying postage or railway carriage on them. No doubt, some of this argument is sound ; but several years ago when it was being tried out on myself, I had a price-list from a very reputable skin merchant in my pocket, which showed me that the gipsy was offering less than half the market value for rabbit skins.

This winter moleskins have dropped in price for some unknown reason. It may be that coats made of these pelts have become unfashionable, but most trappers will hope fervently that they do not go completely out ; for the sale of skins represents part of their livelihood. Generally speaking, a mole trapper gets so much per acre, and this may total up to a fair wage ; but almost as much again is got from skin money in favourable times. So this source of revenue is important. In fact, I have known amateur mole trappers who worked solely for the money received from the sale of skins ; and I knew a keeper who was lured from his regular calling after the first war by the boom in moleskins, which were then worth 1s. 2d. each for good specimens. Incidentally, this man ultimately went to New Zealand where he trapped rabbits for their skins only.

Graded Moleskins

But moleskins have their grades, even with the best of firms. There are firsts, seconds, thirds, extra small, and perhaps tainty ones. First-class skins should be clear and measure four by five inches when stretched ; but today they will probably fetch not more than 5d. each. Other grades go down the scale to one penny, which means that undersized, or otherwise imperfect skins, are hardly worth the trouble of tacking them carefully out on boards to dry. These low prices are all the more surprising when we consider that, owing to the increasing use of poison instead of traps, moleskins must be scarcer now than they were, say, 30 years ago.

Stoat and weasel skins are, however, in better demand, although their comparative scarcity prevents the trapper from making a fortune from the sale of them. They are mainly wanted for export, and a good stoat skin is worth 2s. 6d., while the same item from a weasel will make a shilling less. Apparently merchants are not particularly interested in ermines, or at least they never quote separately for their pelts, although we are brought up to believe that ermine fur is something rare and precious. One young keeper with whom I worked used to skin all his stoats and weasels, but I always felt that he earned their cash value fully, when the aroma from them assailed my nostrils !

Nationalised Salmon

The Scottish Tourist Board recently appealed for specific ideas for attracting tourists to Scotland to increase the "tourist industry" that already commands some £55 million annually. At a meeting of the executive council of the District Councils' Association for Scotland it was proposed that the fishing rights on as many salmon rivers as possible should be purchased by the Tourist Board and made available to the public.

The proposal was adopted by the council and forwarded to the Tourist Board. A supporter of the proposal said that all salmon rivers in Scotland should be nationalised, and that anglers should buy licences to fish them through the Post Office.

There was considerable adverse criticism of the charges made for salmon fishing and the amount of work done to maintain stocks. The only opposition to the original proposal came from a Pitlochry representative who claimed that few anglers would come to Scotland "to fish just another public river."

The big shoot owner can call on a strong team of helpers.

The Young Shot

Host and Guest

by Petrel

THE role of shooting host is an exacting one and not always enviable. The organisation of a day's shooting is no small undertaking, and the good host will, of course, put his guests and the arrangements for their benefit first, and his own sport a long way second. In the end, after all, the smooth running and result of the day are his responsibility, and those irascible characters who are so quick to leave everything to their managers and keepers and even speedier in their castigation when something goes wrong, might remember the old Services' principle that the buck can always be passed downwards, but that ultimately it is the man at the top who carries the can.

Always excepting the weather, there are few circumstances beyond the control of the big shoot host. He has the men and machinery to carry out his plans to best advantage, and above all, he has the birds. If by some mischance a drive goes wrong, or one or two of his guns are off form and the bag is not quite up to expectations, he will at least be secure in the knowledge that he has shown his guests some sport and that there is enough in the bag to make everyone's efforts worthwhile. On the rough shoot, however, where no birds are reared, the margin between success and failure is much narrower, and the host's headache is more painful in proportion.

Hard to Decide

On the small shoot one cannot afford to waste opportunities, for where the ground is narrowly confined, birds once flushed may offer no second chance. Variety, besides being the spice of life, is also often the source of indecision. At the covert side no guest will dream of shooting at stray pigeon before the drive has started, for fear of giving scarifying notice to the game still undisturbed within the wood. But on the unkeepered rough shoot where game is relatively scarce, and there is no guarantee of its whereabouts at any particular moment, the odd pigeon may represent the difference between something and nothing in the gamebag at the end of the beat. The decision whether to shoot anything and everything that offers a chance, or to hold fire in the hope of finding bigger and better game is a difficult one for the host, who finds himself in the position of the famished traveller who is uncertain whether to select a quick snack or to wait for the *specialité de la maison,* which may after long preliminaries turn out to be "off."

This is where the man whose shoot comprises a number of small shootings is at an advantage, for each of these will doubtless have been selected for its own speciality which will be the first objective. Fortunate indeed is the rough shoot host who can rely on finding pheasants at A, duck at B, snipe, perhaps, at C, and then take his guests to shoot pigeon coming into roost at D. Nor is such a state of affairs as unattainable as it sounds, providing the rough shooter looks hard, refuses to give up the search and realises, above all, that to enjoy good shooting it is not always necessary to own or rent large tracks of land.

Exactly Where and When

If the best is to be made of any shoot, large or small, it is of the greatest importance that the host explains to his guests exactly what are his intentions and makes his directions to them quite plain. He himself can spoil his most cunning manoeuvre by not indicating clearly where he wants his companions to stand, or by not giving them sufficient time to reach their position before he starts driving towards them. To avoid the latter, and in order not to waste time, some arrangement should be made for the forward guns to signal when they are in position. A whistle is the answer to this one.

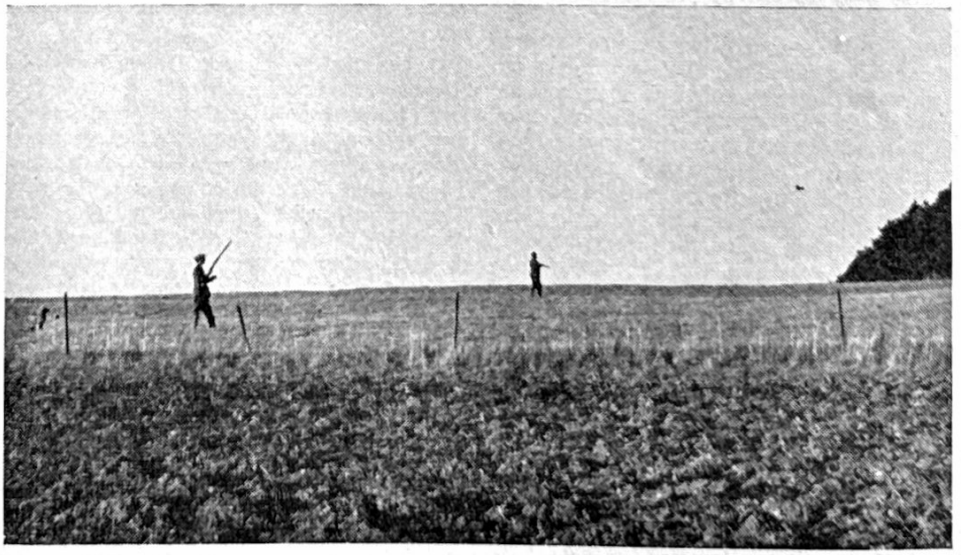
Similarly it is the guest's duty to make sure that he understands his part of the plan and to carry it out explicitly. I speak with feeling here. During the Christmas holiday I invited two friends for a very rough mixed day on my tiny and scattered preserves, and the first "drive" was to include a thick hedge and Lilliputian spinney which I knew to contain at least two cock pheasants. One gun was late arriving so I decided to make a start and sent G. on with instructions to stand back in the field facing the centre of the spinney. On my way to the hedge-end I met the unpunctual V. whom I bade cover one corner of the spinney, at the same time asking him to move G. to the other corner. Sure enough the two cocks were found at home by the dog and away they sailed slap over V.'s position. But no gun was fired.

When I rounded the corner of the spinney there was G. twenty yards left of dead centre, while of V. there was no sign. He had stopped to dally with the distaff side of the Padworth Gun Club while G. had moved to a "better position." Next time they can do the beating.

If you are placed in a certain spot, remember that not only has it been chosen to give you a shot, but also because it is a safe position. By moving you may endanger not only yourself but also the other guns.

Be patient, too, especially when pigeon shooting. Two of us went after the pigeon recently among woodlands where they were feeding on the beech-mast. It was vital to the success of the operation that we each stayed put and shuttled the birds to and from each other. My companion got bored first and went for a walk round. All the birds pitched in his trees during his absence and I got no shooting until he returned. Later I went "scouting" in another wood and returned to find the trees above my hide full of birds. Between us we made a nonsense of what should have been a good shoot.

I am always apprehensive about asking a guest to join me in my pottering, for it a well-known fact that when the time comes great expectations so often dissolve into disappointment. What was the best place for duck or pigeon last week is more than likely to prove blank when occupied by a guest seven days later, and the situation becomes even more awkward when the host in the presumed worse place gets all the shooting.



The rough shooter may have only a single companion to help him.

Lore of the Land

by John Muers Raby

IF ever any farming year could be described as uneventful, 1956 was certainly not that year. A February during which the thermometer never rose above freezing point was followed in most parts of England by a drought of almost unprecedented intensity which lasted through the spring and well into June. Early grazing was virtually non-existent, and all types of crops suffered a setback from which few fully recovered. Corn which did make reasonable growth, despite the conditions, was badly laid by the ferocious gales of July, and such crops as were still harvestable afterwards, occasioned the corn farmer a nightmare which lasted through a rain-sodden August and September, well into October. Looking back, I find it hard to recall a year which provided such a variety of disastrous types of weather.

Such gloom as could not be promoted by the weather was more than made up for by events on the economic front. To the worries of an industry already "credit-squeezed" to death (for it is the small self-employed man who suffers most from the Chancellor's economy measures) was added a dangerous over-production of milk, with its attendant fall in price, and an almost total disappearance of any discernable bottom to the beef market, due mainly to unrestricted imports of chilled meat from the Argentine. In common with many others, I gave fervent thanks for my ewe flock; sheep, living entirely off the land and requiring a minimum of labour, can withstand the economic gales of rising costs and falling prices better than most departments on the farm.

But, believe it or not, with the banshee of over-production wailing just around the corner, we were still being exhorted to greater efficiency, production, and confidence! However, through all the dark clouds of despondency which darkened the agricultural skies during this period a gleam of light persisted. The National Farmers' Union was engaged in discussions with the Government in an endeavour to formulate the long-term policy so long advocated by the industry, and for so long resisted by this and previous administrations.

In November, that gleam of light suddenly erupted into a positive burst of sunshine, in the form of a White Paper. This set out the Government's policy on the price structure for Agriculture, and announced grants for capital improvements up to one third of the cost. These were designed to enable many farmers to achieve that standard of efficiency which had hitherto eluded them by reason of outdated buildings, bad roads, and inadequate water supplies, etc. As yet the contents of the White Paper have not become law, but there is no reason to suppose that they will not become so.

Important Step Forwards

Whilst the industry has in the past been too often bitterly disappointed by the effects of Government policy to throw its hat over the barn, it is generally agreed that the White Paper is the most important step towards stability which has been taken for many years, and the declining confidence of the past few years has given way to a cautious optimism about the future. But it would be foolish to pretend that by limiting the price fall of all the 1947 Agricultural Act commodities to four per cent per annum, the White Paper supplies all the answers to everything.

As a correspondent pointed out in the farming Press at the time assuming an annual depreciation in the value of the pound sterling of five per cent, a farmer might still have to increase his production by nine per cent annually to maintain his position; not an easy achievement year after year. Moreover, Treasury support can only be practicable providing it remains reasonable. If the burden on the Exchequer becomes too great, as has happened in several instances recently, the provisions of the White Paper could not be implemented without seriously endangering the national economy. But the risk of this can in turn be diminished by the Government itself, by some measure of control on the import of cheap food; for instance, the duty recently levied on Danish bacon.

It has been a splendid year for wild pheasants.

But however the new guarantees operate, the mere fact that the Government rate the industry of sufficient importance to warrant them is, in itself, a tonic to the countryside. For it is immeasurably depressing to be inescapably engaged in the production of something which one feels nobody much wants anyway, and is just as easy to buy from the foreigner, quite apart from the financial angle.

Wild Pheasants and Grey Squirrels

What a splendid year for wild pheasants this has been in my neighbourhood. Broods which were brought off during the early drought obviously got away to a good start, and judging by a fair show of robust "squeakers" in October, second broods could not have been so badly hit by the stormy summer as was at first feared. On the unkeepered shoots where I do most of my shooting, bags have been double, and sometimes treble the numbers killed over the last few years. And this, in many instances, when "cocks only" was the rule: for many of us, having so many more birds than is customary, took the opportunity to try and build up stocks, and shot hens very lightly. On the other hand, the few shoots round about this district where pheasants are still reared, report an indifferent season, due in the main to serious epidemics of "the gapes."

Although the improvement in the wild bird situation could be credited largely to the good breeding weather, I like to line it up too with my pet theory about the effect of grey squirrels on game preservation. For during the last year we have been as near free from these pests as makes no difference. This disappearance of the grey squirrel, which, I always suspect accounts for more pheasant eggs than all the rest of the predators put together, has been attributed to various causes: squirrel "flu," squirrel-eating stoats, breeding cycles, tail money, and so forth, but whatever the reason they became as rare as rabbits for a time. Now, I regret to report, they are returning in some strength.

The Young Shot

The only sportsman I know who welcomes this revival is the junior member of my own household. Since he is expected to provide the bulk of the cost of the powder he burns out of his own pocket, his shooting necessarily has a certain commercial aspect. He naturally finds that squirrels at two shillings a time and a ninety per cent kill are a much better proposition than pigeon at sixpence a time with, perhaps, only a fifty per cent kill, which is obviously a dead loss with full price cartridges.

However, the young man in question is not entirely devoid of business acumen and has struck a more profitable bargain with his mother, who in her turn, is not giving much away: for two couples of pigeon at something over market price can still provide a more economical meal for the family than our friend the butcher is capable of doing. Nor does the sight of a dozen pigeon hanging in the larder awaiting attention depress my wife any longer, for she has now evolved a rapid way of dressing these birds which makes nonsense of the old plucking and drawing, and is not wasteful, assuming that the breast is the only part fit for the table.

She plucks the breast only (half a minute) then with a sharp pair of scissors, cuts out the whole breast, bone and all (one minute). When braised or included in a steak pie the meat, of course, falls away from the bone of its own accord, so the total time per bird, to prepare it for the table, is one and a half minutes.

However, this all takes me a long way from the original subject of the grey squirrel, so much beloved by my son for its two-bob tail. But as much as I commend the destruction of these unmitigated pests, I must confess to a certain irritability when the entire line is held up on the shooting days what time the young tycoon endeavours to dislodge the owner of one of these valuable appendages from its refuge down a rabbit hole.

GAME FARMS

We have just received the first two brochures and price lists from the Gaybird and Kidmore Game Farms which excite both nostalgia and anticipation. Game farms were never busier and we remind readers to order their eggs and poults in good time this year. We would also repeat our plea for the rearing of more wild duck.

Mr. Brazil of Kidmore Game Farm makes the old English Blackneck his speciality. As usual a most attractive cover picture decorates the extensive Gaybird list.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters and photographs are invited for this page. They should be as brief as possible, and the names and addresses of senders must be given, though these need not necessarily be published. Correspondence should be addressed to The Editor, The Shooting Times & Country Magazine, 29 Old Bond Street, London, W.1. 'Phone: HYDe Park 2556/2557.

WISBECH TIDE TABLES

Sir,—I understand, on enquiring from the Harbour Master, that the "heights" of the tides shown in the 1957 Wisbech Tide Tables have been amended to show the actual depth of water at Wisbech, and the figure for any particular tide is 2½ ft. less than it would have been under the system in use for the previous tables.

As wildfowlers are in the habit of staying out on the marshes in the Wash over some of the smaller tides, I feel it necessary to point out that a tide now shown as 14 ft. is the same height as one previously shown as 16½ ft.

All East Anglian wildfowlers using these tables—especially the "occasional visitors"—are warned that they will find the water 2½ ft. deeper than they would have expected on the figures given. This fact could certainly lead to some discomfort and might possibly prove fatal if they attempted to get off the marsh when it was covered with water.

W. G. SMITH,
March, Cambs.

DEAD GULLS : RIFLE SHOOTING

Sir, — "Lone Fowler" ("Dead Gulls," issue January 11) would have more to shoot at if he and others would reduce the numbers of the great gulls which take so many duck eggs and young. If he kills a duck he ought also to kill one of its enemies to preserve the balance. Perhaps gulls are not often used for human food, but the fresh breast meat makes hens lay, and the carcases make good compost.

Mr. W. H. Fuller ("Standing and Kneeling") does not seem to realise that the difference between wildfowling and target shooting is not only in the position of the shooter. The fundamental difference is that the former is sport and the latter a scientific game. Here we try to combine the two. We meet on a Saturday afternoon in August, competing, each man for himself, at 100 and 200 yards, with the same sporting rifles we use during the year on rabbits and vermin. It is practical shooting and good fun, and it is surprising at times how high the scores are.

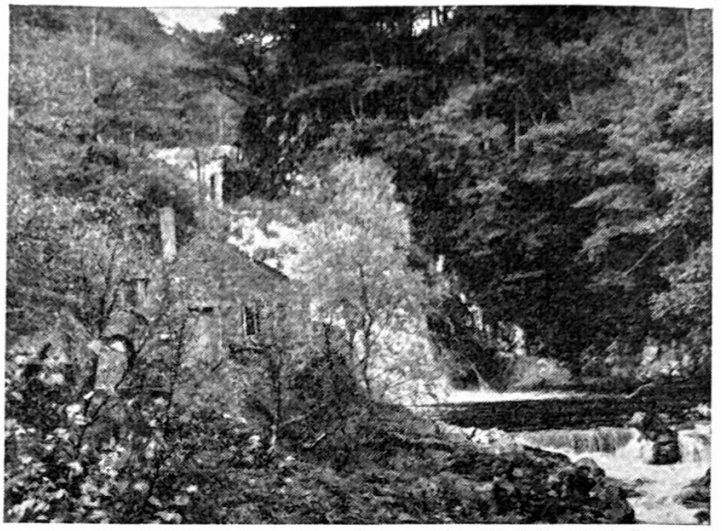
Perhaps Mr. Barry Cooke ("Small-bore Olympics") would tell us how the Russians use their post foresights, whether cutting the black in half or at six o'clock. It would also be interesting to know the principle of the Rumanians' double foresight and how it works.

H. K. SETH-SMITH,
Blair, Achiltibuie, Garve, Ross-shire.

[We have sent a copy of your letter to Mr. Barry Cooke, our correspondent in Australia and have asked him to comment. Mr. Richard Arnold will shortly describe the double foresight principle.—Ed.]

GOLD !

Sir,—News of gold and gold mines has its own special thrill ! But remember, more gold has been put into the ground than has ever come out of it. A newspaper recently reported on the hopes and plans to reopen one of the fifty odd old mines in neighbourhood of Dolgelly, perhaps the richest gold-producing area in Britain.



The last mine to have been regularly worked. (See letter, "Gold!").

I enclose a photograph, taken about ten years ago, of the last mine to have been regularly worked. I think it closed about 1930. The building itself might be described as a blot beside the lovely waterfall of Raiadr Mawddach, on the River Mawddach about seven miles north of Dolgelly and near the edge of Coed y Brenin (the Wood of the King), probably the most beautiful State forest in Britain and some 17,000 acres in extent.

There are salmon and trout in this and other rivers of the territory, which lies a little south of Snowdonia proper. But, though there are a very few blackgame and red grouse, it is certainly not so much a shooting country as good naturalists' country—with wild goats, peregrine falcons, merlins, and even (though very rarely seen) a few pine martens.

BYWAYMAN.
Somerset.

IMPROVING PARTRIDGE STOCKS

Sir,—As a gamekeeper, and a regular reader of your journal, I have been following with interest the recent correspondence on the above subjects. It becomes increasingly evident that, following a succession of wet and cold Junes, stocks of partridges are steadily on the decline, or, at best, barely holding their own.

In the issue for November 16, "Tower-Bird" advocates the placing of additional eggs in "safe" nests in and around the centre of the shoot. That would be a risky policy; it means adding greatly to the strain on the adult birds in finding food for the extra chicks. Even more important, they would be unable to provide adequate warmth for the unnaturally large brood.

Prior to the last war, I used to work what was then called the "Nebworth system," that entailed finding as many partridge nests as possible, removing the eggs, and replacing with dummies—exactly the same as one does with the "Euston system." When the eggs had reached the chipping stage under domestic hens, we used to give back to the sitting partridge no more than 10 chipped eggs, the surplus we reared by hand under bantams. Using this system, we were always sure of having young stock for the following breeding season.

No doubt the method as advised by the I.C.I., whereby the young hen partridges are kept confined in pens until the following spring, before release on to the shoot, would be of great benefit to the stock, but the snag, as I see it, is the understaffing of the average shoot (5,000 acres or more for one keeper to overlook being not uncommon today). He just would not be able to cope with the extra work involved.

On the other hand, where a few hundred pheasants are reared annually, I see no reason why a few coops of partridges cannot also be reared, using the new method of feeding as practiced at Fordingbridge, and turning the young birds loose at six or seven weeks in the middle of the shoot. I am quite sure any barren or otherwise unattached old birds would quickly adopt them.

I, myself, reared two clutches this past season and placed them out. Within a week three old birds had taken them over, and in the recent mild spell they are beginning to pair up.

I am sure readers will agree that any help, however small, we can provide to build up our partridge stocks to something near normal will be worth giving, it is up to us (keepers and shooters) to try and provide that help. Winter feeding is most important, and if we have some hand-reared young stock to feed, so much the better.

H. CHURCHILL,
Peterborough,
Northants.

["Tower-Bird" writes: "A partridge nest may contain from under 10 eggs up to 20 and even more. I advocate filling up the smaller nests, and always did so when eggs were handy. If food cannot be planted, then, of course, winter feeding will do the trick."—Ed.]

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New Books

The Last Passenger, by James Ralph Johnson (The Macmillan Co., New York and London, 19s.). As those of us know who have studied the history of the passenger pigeon, less than a century ago the skies of North America were darkened with immense flocks of the bird. The wanton massacre and eventual extinction (according to the records, the last passenger pigeon died in Cincinnati Zoo in 1914) of this unusual and spectacular species is a tragic chapter in the history of wild life.

It might well be thought that nothing new could ever be written on the subject, but Major Johnson has now produced, with quiet restraint, a beautifully written book; an imaginative recreation of the life of Blue, the last passenger. He fills page after page with scenes of truly piercing accuracy and powerful understatement, with the result that this story is far and away "above" the level of the average nature story. It is well illustrated with an unusual type of sketch, but one in perfect keeping with the text.

Emperor Penguins, by Jean Rivolier (Elek Books, 15s.). When this reviewer was a small boy, and his father used to take him to the London zoo, it was usual for a second adult to accompany them. The latter was told-off to show the small boy round, while his father spent all his time watching the penguins. Few things in life amused him more, and it is felt that he was by no means extraordinary in this respect.

This book, as the title makes clear, is about Emperor penguins, and the story starts when, late in 1951, a wintering party left France to relieve the French Antarctic base at Port-Martin. The relief was accompanied by a special detachment which had been selected to spend a year at Geology Point, a remote coastal area of Adelie Land which housed a colony of Emperor penguins, there to observe and to annotate the lives of the birds at close quarters—from the time when the first penguin emerged from the unfrozen sea at the end of March until the day late in December when the birds swam away to spend the brief summer in a resort which man has yet to discover.

Dominating the book is a "killer" backcloth in the implacable Antarctic, taking a toll of lives, but the story of the penguins is one which must interest and amuse even the layman, and certainly much of that amusement is reflected in the many excellent and unusual photograps of the colony.

Monagaso, by John Alfred Jordan (Kays, 18s.). Here is a book of memories: memories of the days of young manhood; of days of a white hunter in Africa when it was still a frontier; of days when there were no mechanised safaris, no moving cameras, no film stars on Kilimanjaro. John Jordan was a friend of the Masai and the Wanderobo. The chief of the Setick Lumbwa made him overlord of two thousand spearmen. He sought the elephant stone in the head of the tuskless bull. He was the most notorious ivory poacher along the borders of "German East." He once killed forty crocs in one day on Lake Victoria. His story, told to and recorded by John Pebble, shows a welling-up of nostalgia—a gentle sigh, without bitterness. There is respect shown for the animals; even admiration, and a simple pride in his own achievements. He is proud that he has seen a thousand elephants feeding in the Semiliki valley; that he has been a guest at Labusoni's terrible elephant hunt; that he has outwitted German frontier patrols. He is proud that he made his wife the first white woman to cross Africa—a shocking, haunting journey on which their first child was still-born. "I chose to live the way I did," says the old elephant warrior, "because I liked it, because it called for strength and gave me strength, and that is what a man enjoys in living. I should have died in Africa many times, but I lived, and now I remember. This was my Africa and it is all gone."

Man Explores the Sea, by James Dugan (Hamish Hamilton, 30s.). Quite as large as life in outer space, which is all the rage just now, and twice as exciting as life in inner space—or in other words beneath the oceans of the world. In this adventure story of the assault on this last frontier of our planet by adventurers, gold-seekers, sportsmen, photographers, inventors, soldiers and submariners, Mr. Dugan keeps the reader enthralled—and often on tenterhooks from start to finish. From the "frogmen" of Xerxes to the amazing exploits of wartime submariners and the major and magnificent salvage operations on the Comet Yoke-Yoke, and submarine Affray, he traces man's amusing, exciting and often tragic undersea exploits, and we have no hesitation in saying that this is quite the most readable book in the modern underwater "spate" that we have come across. Profusely and very well illustrated with more than 80 photographs and line drawings.

Gilbert White in His Village, by Cecil S. Emden (Oxford University Press, 15s. in U.K. only). Previous books about Gilbert White have not taken much account of the disclosures he made in his journals regarding his mode of life in his home and village. And even where such did occur, they seemed unimportant when read in the context of the journals.

But in this character-sketch of Gilbert White, such material has been sifted and then built up into a valuable picture of which enables the reader to enjoy the closer acquaintance of a genius who possessed notable kindliness and capacity for friendship, quite apart from those abilities for which he is better known.

The book is pleasantly illustrated with chapter-heading sketches, and book-end maps of Selborne. All those who have read Gilbert White will enjoy this more intimate picture of the man himself.

The Curious Traveller: Lancaster to Lakeland, by Jessica Lofthouse (Hale, 18s.). A summing up of the Press verdict on Miss Lofthouse's first "Curious Traveller" book might also be applied to this present volume—"A wandering book written with love and a poet's sensibility"—for the author brings to life so much which is half forgotten, that even the most devoted lovers of Lakeland will find new vistas and information in every mile.

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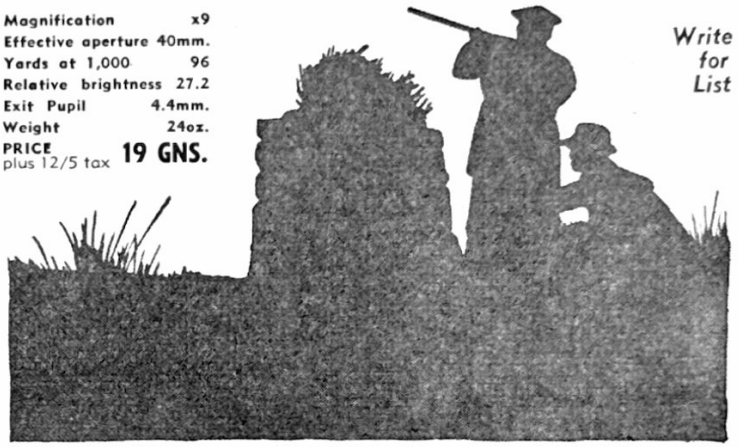

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GUN GOSSIP

by North Country

IF we are not wildfowlers, we need to be pigeon shooters today—now that the rabbit is temporarily off the list. For as January draws to its close and we would normally be anticipating five or six weeks of rabbiting during the lengthening days of late winter, we have very little to shoot. There may be a few hares—this depending on locality. But only in comparatively few places is it feasible to shoot hares continuously.

A small farmer asked me how he could entertain a few friends to a bit of shooting at this time. Until a year or two ago this man had relied on the rabbits on his hundred acres to provide a bit of sport for his friends at Christmas and during the early part of the New Year. There is no game proper on his land—just the odd snipe in mid-winter. So take away the rabbits, and what have you? This man's circumstances are typical of those of thousands of small dairy farmers who had it not been for the rabbit might well have never fired a gun. I am quite sure that many of them would never have even owned or possessed a gun.

Taking a Keeper's Advice

I suggested to this man that he should approach the local keeper and see what could be arranged (if anything) about pigeon shooting parties. Not far away is a considerable area of woodland in which the game shooting season is nearly over. Late afternoon and early evening shooting might be enjoyed here with the keeper's consent. Indeed this shooting at roosting time *can* be very fascinating and excellent sport, when carried out properly and given a slice of luck. There does not seem to be any large-scale shoots in this district so it is up to the farmer to do something on his own.

A keeper's advice is often invaluable in affairs of this sort. For so much depends on where and how you stand when awaiting roosting pigeon. It is not just a question of placing yourself where birds seem to come in force, for quite often such places are not the most suitable from which to shoot. That is the vital need—to find a spot where with reasonable marksmanship you can make a bag. Woodland shooting is tricky. And to say the least, it is exasperating to have birds coming and going and to be unable to "welcome" them because of the timber. Yet that is what often happens.

High trees usually mean high birds. Perhaps they will be too high. It is no good shooting at these little Gabriels. Far better to leave well alone and confine yourself to the possible! Indeed it is the steady careful shot who is most likely to make a bag at roosting pigeon. Besides, if you are a small party other woods in the vicinity are likely to be untenanted by guns and birds will soon find this out and retire to more peaceful quarters. The less noise in your business of pigeon killing the better for all (not forgetting the pocket). At present prices pigeon shooting can drain the purse and with perhaps precious little return.

On The Flight Line

We have found a place where birds can be intercepted. This is a patch of copse over which they pass *en route* for larger roosting timber. I don't know how long it will last. But just now, by placing yourself among the ash poles and in the flight line you will be assured of some steady and reasonably straightforward shooting—with room enough to align and swing your gun. And as the light begins to go you may safely take more chances. Here you enjoy better shooting than at the trees where the birds hope to roost.

Farmer's Viewpoint

From a farmer's point of view pigeon shooting (actually a very fine sport) can never be so satisfactory as rabbiting and ferreting. For while the pigeon is here today and gone tomorrow, the rabbit is (or was) there all the time. Only wholesale poaching made any serious difference. Morover, in the case of rabbits, he could in so many ways suit himself. Pigeon, generally speaking, must be tackled when they happen to be about. For it is only the professional shooter who can move about an area and set to work where his presence is needed. The great thing is to remain on friendly terms with local keepers. In the case of a large estate, a farmer may come in for a lot of pigeon shooting from now to the middle of March. The ordinary standard game gun will probably be the best weapon. But I do believe in a full load of shot—such as 1¼oz. This costs no more, and if Nos. 6 or 7 shot are used, the generous pattern will not allow birds to escape any well-directed charge.

Dawn Chorus

Danny Kaye, who loves playing in London despite the havoc the foggy climate plays on his throat, said recently: "Ah, London—what a city! Where else in the world can you wake up in the morning to the coughing of birds?"—*American Weekly.*

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Small-Bore Suggestions—I

by W. H. Fuller

What was good enough for grandfather is no longer good enough for the modern rifleman

THE Council of The National Small-bore Rifle Association has recently briefed its technical group, the Arms and Equipment Committee to look into and examine target design. Action in this matter has been brewing for some years and at last it looks as though something might be done. This business is generally received with rather mixed feelings by both rank and file. It seems to appear to some that the technically minded minority, the rebels, of which I am undoubtedly one, are rushing British small-bore shooting to the edge of a precipice over which the whole structure must inevitably tumble to disaster if we are not stopped. To others we are building a bridge to carry us safely across the chasm which inseparable high scores and rigid adherence to worn-out practices are digging deeper and deeper with every year which passes.

The majority of shooters and organisers appear to be quite hesitant to take sides and this could be due to the real complexity of the whole problem. When however, one approaches the subject from an entirely fresh angle ; when so to write, one starts to cut down the trees so that we can see through the wood ; it becomes apparent that there are two woods—long-range outdoor shooting and short-range indoor shooting. On going into the matter very fully it can be shown that these two can be clearly separated without causing any damage to the whole except to the moss and undergrowth which in any case only clutters up the outlook and chokes development in general.

The question of target design which I have dealt with in this journal and very extensively elsewhere, so much so that I am almost as browned-off as some of you may be and which I do not intend to analyse here, is complex only because it is discussed in terms of its application to all range-distances as if they were all one and the same thing. The stumbling block is undoubtedly in accepting any such assumption. By no stretch of the imagination can short-range indoor shooting be considered in parallel terms with long-range outdoor shooting. The clear and concise separation of the two immediately provides almost automatic solutions to many of our problems including that of target design. The technical problems of target design can be easily solved ; in fact if you look at it the right way they never really existed. The real problem lay in the way we used the target and not in the target itself.

Entirely Different

No one, not even the most vehement of my many critics will deny that indoor short-range shooting is an entirely different kettle of fish from outdoor long-range shooting. True we use the same rifles, the same ammunition, the same rules and regulations and the cause of the recent and present pother, the same, or allegedly the same target. But we have gone much further than this and have been doing so for years, digging bigger and better chasms for ourselves to fall into. We couple up competitions, averages, classifications, rules, conditions as if all range distances were one and the same thing. We further complicate the whole issue by arranging some of our most important competitions to be shot over two or even three of these ranges and later I will try to explain how futile is this particular procedure.

The incidental complication in permitting clubs to shoot over 25 *or* 20 *or* 15 yards, is a problem of short-range indoor shooting and has nothing to do with long-range shooting. Unfortunately we have in the past tried to make it so. We are fully aware of the reasons for continuing this rather accommodating practice and although we might lose perhaps four or five per cent of our shooting strength for a short while if we took the sensible view the pistol people took a few years ago when they cancelled 10 yard competitive shooting and standardised on 20-yards, the cancellation of 15 and 20-yard competitive shooting is neither contemplated nor counselled.

Very few people appear to be aware that short-range indoor shooting is peculiar to Britain. No other country has the organisation, the leagues, either country-wide or local, or the postal competitions that we have in this country. Almost the entire strength of the whole movement lies in our club life. More men and women take part in all-the-year-round short-range shooting in Britain than in all the rest of the world put together. It is our pigeon and we should not attempt to mate it with long-range shooting and practices which pertain outside our shores, not even to the long-range shooting of our own country. In America there in some local 50 feet " gallery " shooting, but their main interest is in open-air long-range shooting at 50 and 100 yards. On the Continent there are a few 25 metre ranges and even fewer 20 metre ranges, their main interest being with 50 metre shooting.

Target Design

Even the I.S.U. rules do not mention ranges less than 50 metres. As far as they are concerned ranges such as ours do not exist. In passing it would be of interest to know how the I.S.U. would tackle the design of a target for 20 metres which would give them scores comparable with those of their 300 metre shooting, the basis of the new I.S.U. recommendations, which very, very rarely produces a possible and where scores of 95 are considered exceptional.

So what it amounts to is simply this. Instead of the clear and easy one-range shooting of the Continent, instead of the comparatively easy double range shooting of the Americans, we shoot over 100, 50, 25, 20 and 15 yards. We also attempt to fit in 50 metre shooting whenever we can and in addition use adaptions of this 50 metre target at all our five ranges. No wonder we find the design of a universal target an almost unsolvable problem.

This is going to disturb quite a lot of thinking. No one, when he really looks into the matter, will deny the futility of shooting the good old-fashioned Dewar Course. Just two 10-shot cards at 50 yards plus two 10-shot cards at 100 yards. The targets are alleged to offer the same shooting difficulty ; it says so in the rule book although the experienced practical long-range shooter knows that this is not so and although here and there cases can be quoted to disprove the rule, in general better scores will be made by most people at the shorter range.

I simply ask, in my quiet old-fashioned way, why do we have to shoot two cards at what is undoubtedly an easier range and then two more at a more difficult distance ? We get no more points for a possible at 100 yards than we do for one at 50 yards and we simply add all the four scores into a total in which all discrimination is lost. This comment applies to all Dewar Course competitions whether they are shot at open meetings or in the very popular National League. Why do these later teams have to shoot two cards in every match at a range which in most cases will give them a better score than in the other two cards they have to shoot ?

If a four-card match is the requirement, why not shoot all of them at 100 yards ? If some of you wish to shoot competitive 50 yard shooting for the mere sop of being able to look at a better score, then by all means have a 50 yard national competition, but please do give up the idea that two cards at one range and two cards at another mean anything. The arithmetical futility of trying to add apples to pears should have been knocked out of you at school. So why still go on trying to do it ?

More Nonsense

No one, having read the previous paragraph will deny also the similar nonsense of the conditions of the County Cup and certain Open Meeting Competitions, where one has to shoot one card at 25 yards, one card at 50 yards and a third card at 100 yards. The futility of the arrangement in modern parlance just " sends me." Surely if the competitions are to test the ability of marksmen, would it not be reasonable to ask them to shoot all their cards at the same distance, preferably over the longest ? Why pander to high scores and records by falsely loading genuine long-range scores with those made at a half and a quarter of the real distance and over which most reasonably efficient marksmen cannot but fail to make very high scores even if they do not always attain the possible.

There is a weak excuse, a very weak one, for the conditions of the Home Countries International matches shot in Scotland and at Bisley each year where the teams shoot through the ranges without sighters. But even here the team member who is selected to shoot for his country and fails to put his first one through the centre because he does not know his " clicks " should not be in an International team. It would be just as sensible to ask the teams to shoot one card at 100 yards and give them a bonus of 200 points for not shooting the 25 yard and the 50 yard cards, just to keep continuity in the record. But of course it would be much better if we shot three at 100 yards and had done with what can only be adequately described as nonsense of the nth degree. I know I am going to be shot at from all ranges and from all angles for daring to make such preposterous suggestions and comments but we have had to put up with a lot of nonsense in the past.

This is quite simple. There are no 50 yard competitions as such, except at open meetings and even here they are invariably aggregated with other range competitions. There is of course the 50 yard/50 metre Metric League, another addition to the shambles of indecision.

Every club which wants to shoot in the National League must at great cost erect a stop butt at 50 yards, simply in order to cover the requirements of Dewar Course shooting. It seems to me to be past all reasoning and I will therefore just leave it at that. If certain clubs wish to follow I.S.U. practices, and there are quite a few who will want to do so, then a middle distance range should be 50 metres, but under no circumstances should this range be involved with shooting at other ranges.

(To be concluded next week)

The Strange Case of the Identical Targets

by Geoffrey Moore

WHILE it is accepted that the odds against the same four hands being dealt at bridge are astronomical, how much greater must be the odds against two identical targets being fired in the same competition. And the lower the score, the greater the odds become. It is natural enough, therefore, to assume, should this happen, that the cards have been placed one behind the other on the butts.

Luckily the standard of sportsmanship in small-bore matches is so high, that steps to guard against unfair play of this sort are seldom even contemplated. And it must be so with a sport which is largely conducted by opposing teams firing on their own ranges without independent witnesses.

Yet one such case did happen. It was a long time ago, and it is unlikely that any of those concerned are still actively engaged in shooting. The facts, such as they are known, were these. In relating them, all the names used are, of course, fictitious.

The teams concerned were two junior ones, belonging to different clubs in the same city. I will call them Kings Road F and Queens Street H. The secretary of Kings Road club, on examining his opponent's cards, was horrified to find that two cards attributed to F. Hindsight and G. Wirebrush were identical in every respect. The score was 97.

Not knowing what to do, and anxious to avoid being the one to precipitate a scandal, he called in the president of his club to see them. Now the president happened to be a personal friend of the president of Queens Street club, and at once went to see him. The latter was very upset and promised a full investigation, in return for a promise that nothing would be said outside, until the full facts were known. He made no secret of his intention, however, to nail the culprit or culprits and have them expelled from his club.

He considered, in the first place, the shooting records of the two men concerned. Hindsight was normally a steady shot, who quite frequently made 97 or better. Wirebrush on the other hand was more likely to make no more than perhaps 92. Both were ordinary, decent members of the club, always hitherto good sportsmen and not particular friends. From what the president could find out, neither of them was likely to go to extreme lengths to win a league match, though both were keen to do their best.

Having learnt that much, he invited the club secretary, together with the captain of the H team and the two firers to meet him in the office. Three of them came, but Wirebrush was not available. In fact someone said that he had been away from home since about the date of the meeting.

The Unsigned Card

It appeared that the conduct of the junior team's matches had become, through long usage, rather lax. In the first place, the team never fired together, but when they could individually manage to get there. Hindsight said that he remembered firing early in the evening. He said that at no time had he handled his card, and thought that his score had been "in the region of 97." When pressed, he admitted not signing his card, and only then was it noticed that none of the team had signed, although the captain had done so. The captain admitted that he had stayed only to fire his own card, and had signed up all the others on the following evening.

As he had then been in rather a hurry he had only flicked up the corner of each card to sign it, and had not studied any of them. Hindsight could not remember who had pinned up his card on the butt. It appeared that several different people had done this duty during the evening, but none of them could recall precisely having pinned up any of the H team cards.

At this point someone came forward who was able to say, from personal knowledge, that Wirebrush had left on business two days prior to the firing of the match.

So far then, it looked very much as though the two cards, rather improbably it is true, had been pinned up together, and because Wirebrush was not there that evening, no one had noticed the error. It is one thing not to notice when two cards are pinned up together, thought the president, but quite another not to observe the fact on taking them down. Taking the kindest view, this might be due to the marker trying to conceal his mistake, and hoping that it would not be noticed.

Two evenings later, Wirebrush reappeared at the club, and was rather surprised to find that covert glances were being shot in his direction, and that a general air of mystery prevailed. He was not kept in suspense for long, however, as he was asked to step into the secretary's office. There he found the president of the club, who at once began to cross-examine him.

Wirebrush's Evidence

Wirebrush was perfectly frank in his replies. Yes, he well remembered firing in the match with Kings Road F. It was the evening before he had left on business, and he had been delayed with packing, only just arriving at the club in time to shoot. Yes, he had found his card all right, just where they always were, on the table by the door.

Had he pinned it up himself? Certainly not, though he could not remember exactly who had been marking that evening. No he had not signed his card before or afterwards. He did not know that he was supposed to.

The president asked him what sort of card he had had. "Rather good," said Wirebrush, "for me. I should say it was a 97. I got six bulls with my first six shots, but dropped a low 8 with the next. The eighth was another bull, then an inner and a bull at the end for luck."

Only one point failed to tally, and that was the most important one. Had Wirebrush fired at all that evening at the club? Had he been in the city that night, to make it possible for him to do so? On hearing that his friend contradicted him in this, he insisted on bringing round his landlady on the following evening. An elderly lady of undoubted integrity, she said that not only did she recall that Mr. Wirebrush had gone out, saying that he was shooting that evening, but seemed to be "rather pleased with himself" on his return. He was not gone above half-an-hour, she affirmed.

And there the mystery, if there ever was one, has remained ever since. The two presidents met to talk it over. They had to decide whether one of the greatest coincidences in shooting had indeed occurred, although there were no independent witnesses. Or, that there had been collusion between Hindsight, Wirebrush, an unidentified marker and possibly the captain, too. Or, perhaps there had been a mistake when Hindsight fired, carefully covered up by the marker, and that Wirebrush had arrived later in the evening, to find that someone had obligingly fired for him a better card than he was likely to produce, and that vanity had caused him to adopt the card as his own.

I believe they took the only course and mutually agreed to let the matter rest.

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New Year Snap-Shots

(Continued from page 62)

found or fell against the bird which went off, unseen by him, like a stag, jumping a brook and running out of sight a full half-mile away. Presently the old dog came to the brook and crossed it, then down went his nose and he seemed to creep along the line. Half-a-mile onwards we saw him vanish where the pheasant had vanished. Twenty minutes passed, and we saw him coming down the rough road, the cock alive in his mouth. How far he had been one can only conjecture; how many hazards had come his way we can but guess. But he came right up with his game, his knees knocking, his sides heaving, but he remained quite expressionless as we all praised him to the skies. In all my years of shooting and picking-up I have never seen a *better* piece of work.

The other incident concerns only a matter for personal record. During my nearly six years in Sussex I had not shot a golden plover. But when enjoying a short morning flight on Pagham Harbour, a nice little bunch of goldies came racing up a main channel to top the sea-wall and vanish. I was quick enough only to recognise them and get in one shot, collecting three fat birds. Grey plover we have shot this season, and several times we have seen a few golden on various marshes and fields.

To pad out this page, I am reminded that last Saturday I sat for hours on a small island with my back to a barnacle-studded post while the wind raced across sea and land, and I watched Vs and lines of wigeon and other duck flying sky-high overhead, or out to the heaving horizon. Every now and again I found great satisfaction by scratching my back against the barnacles. Two merganzers came flying along to settle not so many yards from my feet. Cormorants came beating up the tide-line, or crossed the island. Some fifty geese left the water, in a straggle, to form up into V-shape as they headed out to sea. At flight time a frost could be felt in the air, and a few snowflakes sped by. No further evidence was needed that we still have the best part of the season in front of us!

GOOD DOG!

They were talking of the sagacity of dogs.

"I read the other day," said A, "of a dog who was daily given a penny to buy a bun with. One day the baker gave him one red-hot from the oven, and burnt his mouth. Next day he came with his penny, showed it to the baker, and then went to the opposition shop over the road, and gave them his custom in future.

"That does not beat my sister's dog," said B. "He was given a penny a day to buy a bun, but he saved them up to the end of each week, and bought sausages instead."—(Quoted from The Topical Times by The Shooting Times of July 18, 1884.)

Gundog News

Conducted by P. R. A. MOXON, Herne Common, Herne Bay, Kent

AS most spaniel enthusiasts will have found to their dismay, it takes a good deal longer to get a dog up to a decent standard of training nowadays, without a plenitude of rabbits. Indeed, I find that in order to reach a satisfactory standard dogs now require almost two full shooting seasons instead of only one. Not only does the absence of rabbits mean lack of scent to keep youngsters questing, but it has made cover thicker and lacking in runs-through to give spaniels reasonably easy access to it.

There is, however, a great deal that can be done by the trainer to get his puppies keen on cover and accustomed to working in it. In days gone by many men never bothered to show their dog much cover until they were at the stage of training where they could be taken into the woods and put among rabbits, and good spaniels took to cover like the proverbial ducks to water. At the present time it does not matter how early you take your puppies into the woods—in fact the earlier the better, in my view. If there are any rabbits about they will be so few in number that they are unlikely to cause any serious rioting, and indeed will be a blessing if they encourage the puppies to enter cover and start using their noses.

Take your puppy or puppies for walks in the woods from the earliest possible age. Take along an older dog, if possible, to encourage them to get away from you and investigate bracken and brambles. Walk through the thick stuff (starting with the least forbidding cover, naturally) and get the youngsters to follow you. Practice retrieving in cover—even throw into it pieces of biscuit or meat if you like. In other words do all you can from the earliest possible moment of your pup's life to get it to regard cover as a natural and enjoyable element in which to work. Do not, however, go to the extreme and overdo cover work to the extent of boring or over-tiring the puppy, or you will defeat your own object. As in most training matters, little and often is the best plan, and it is better to take a puppy out for two or three spells of ten to twenty minutes each day than for one long spell of an hour or more.

(Left to right) Messrs. R. B. Weston-Webb, K. Erlandson and K. Chudley at the Midland Counties Field Trial Society's trials at Milton Park, near Peterborough.

Puppies and Dummies

Another point which is worthy of mention is this. Many people have trouble in getting small puppies to retrieve a dummy, and cannot understand the reason for it. Very frequently the reason is not far to seek, and is that they are using a dummy of unsuitable material or, more likely, of unsuitable size. I mentioned some time ago that I make use of "boat fender" type dummies, these being canvas stuffed with kapok or cork. Many puppies do not take to this type of dummy very readily, and seem to prefer the stuffed rabbit skin or stock, or even an old glove. To overcome this, I get them retrieving willingly whatever dummy they seem to prefer, and then attach this to the canvas dummy, or even cover the canvas one with an old sock for a few days, after which most pups will fetch the despised dummy quite willingly.

Undoubtedly the most attractive dummy of all for a start is a small rabbit skin, although some pups are more apt to bite and chew this type than, for instance, a piece of hose pipe stuffed into an old sock. You have to experiment, find the type and size of dummy that your somewhat difficult puppy prefers, and work away with this until the love of retrieving is thoroughly instilled. Then you can start experimenting. Readers may recall the late Richard Sharpe writing about his experiences with a reluctant spaniel, which refused to retrieve anything at all until one day it picked up a brush and started carrying that around. Dick threw the brush into some light grass, and the puppy dashed after it and made a perfect retrieve. Using the brush as a dummy for a few days, Dick turned this puppy into a useful retriever, and it soon learned to carry anything he cared to throw or hide for it.

The most peculiar things may work when trying to encourage a puppy to pick up. I have often found that different types of dummy are spurned, but if I wrap my handkerchief round one of them and then try it, the result is most gratifying. Sometimes a puppy will always pick up an object which is still moving, but will ignore a still one, and here you can try rolling a ball along short grass, or attaching an ordinary dummy to a length of string and twitching it when the puppy gets near to it. Another point to remember is that retrieving lessons should be given, in the first place, on ground which does not contain distractions in the form of attractive scents or livestock or people. Nothing is more annoying than to throw a dummy out and stand and watch the puppy dash out with every intention of picking up, only to ignore it at the last moment and go boring off on a scent or stand and yap at somebody or something which has just appeared on the scene.

All that I have written above does tie up, although it may appear to embrace several different subjects. It is usual to give lessons which embrace cover work, retrieving and a certain amount of discipline as a mixture. If you get your puppy keen on retrieving first it will take all the more readily to cover when you start practising it therein. You will not, as a general rule, teach your dog to sit before going out to retrieve right at the start, because your early efforts will be directed towards making the puppy mad keen to dash out directly it sees the dummy leave your hand.

Handsome Dividends

To insist upon the wait before retrieving too soon will hinder your training, and might cause the puppy to lose enthusiasm or even put it off retrieving altogether. Short lessons, great patience, and rewarding the dog with praise and a few pats each time it does well will pay handsome dividends.

Another error into which the inexperienced handler may fall is the all-too-common habit of snatching the dummy out of the pup's mouth the moment it comes within reach. No greater mistake can be made, especially with a shy puppy, as it will induce the pupil either to drop the dummy or to circle you rather than come to hand. Do all you can to get your puppy right up to you, and let it stand or sit holding the dummy for a few seconds before taking it, praising and stroking the pupil meanwhile. In this way you will build up confidence, teach it to come right up to hand and to hold the dummy until you are ready to take it.

An interesting point which a reader recently raised in a letter is whether or not to use a lead when teaching the drop. Some trainers refuse to have anything to do with a lead (or say this is so), and others would never dream of dispensing with it. I think it

(Continued on next page, col. 3)

Winner of Open Cocker Stake at the Midland Counties F.T. Society's trials at Milton Park, near Peterborough: Lt.-Cdr. E. A. J. Collard's Blackbuoy of Elan (owner left) and Mr. J. Forbes (handler).

SIXTY YEARS A SHOT—VII

Golden Plover : Pigeon : Curlew

by L. G. W. Wilkinson

A COUPLE or two of those delightful little birds, golden plover, often came into the bag when we were driving grouse on the Sidlaw Hills, or walking-up in Dumfriesshire, and when I first went to live in Northumberland they used to come and feed in a field near the coast road, where houses now stand. I got leave from the farmer to have a shot at them and taught my young son how to drive them over to me while I took up my position behind a potato ramp near the farmyard. This proved successful at first, but the birds soon became wary.

The only time that I really made a bag of golden plover was on the Tay Estuary, where they used to come down to feed on the shore as the tide went out, in hard weather or when snow lay on the ground. I had often got five or six walking along the shore just after high tide, and one day had put a few cartridges in my pockets—nineteen to be exact, and had gone down with my small children who were taking the air in their pram along the Parade.

At the end of this, I left them and went down to the beach. There was about ten yards width of sand visible as the tide went down, and golden plover were arriving all the time from the uplands. Within the space of half-a-mile I had fired off all my cartridges and had twenty-one birds in the bag, having twice killed two at one shot. No doubt I might have gof forty or fifty if I had more cartridges!

I was first introduced to rock doves shooting when staying in Donegal. My brother-in-law and I were taken out along the North Coast by two fishermen in a big boat. The sea was anything but calm, and it took those two all their time to manage the boat as we swung along under the cliffs. Each time we came to a cave, the men stopped rowing, shouted and clapped their hands, while we made ready, as best we could to shoot at the birds as they emerged from the cave. One had to be mighty quick, as they were off along the cliffs in a flash. However, I had done quite a lot of shooting from a boat on the Tay Estuary and knew how to adapt myself to the motion.

My brother-in-law at first was literally quite at sea and could not hit anything. However, when he was about to give up in despair, he got his first pigeon and thereafter was quite successful. One bird which I shot fell on top of the cliff and the boatmen said we could collect it on the way back. But we soon saw a gentleman walking along and he saved us the trouble by picking up the bird and putting it in his pocket. I cannot remember what the total count was, but we had an enjoyable afternoon and a new experience.

Rock-Dove Shooting

One September a friend S and I stayed for the week at a shooting hotel in Caithness. We were told that the rock-dove shooting was good at a big cave on the North Coast. Having reconnoitred the ground we found that there was a ledge of rock jutting out from the cliff near the cave which formed an admirable natural butt. Then there was the problem of retrieving any birds shot, for they must inevitably fall into the sea. We found a fisherman who was willing to sit in his boat near the mouth of the cave and to do what was required.

The plan was to wait for the pigeon as they came in from feeding in the fields about dusk, at that time from 4.30 to 5.30. The plan worked well, but I soon found that unless one made sure of firing *before* a bird turned to go into the cave, though it might be mortally wounded, it always managed to swing into the cave and was lost to us, but if a bird was hit before it turned inwards, it always fell into the sea. We made a fair bag, but again I have forgotten the exact number.

My last experience with rock doves was not so pleasant. During the August of 1915 I had a holiday from war work and took my family to Port Patrick. Here, I was told there was rock-pigeon shooting and hired a boatman to take us out. My eldest boy had a rook-rifle with which to scare the pigeon from the caves. The first stop was at a big cave right below the wireless station, and we had hardly begun operations when we saw a number of men shouting and gesticulating on the top of the cliffs. They evidently thought that a German submarine was trying to blow up the wireless station. I received a threatening letter from the C.O. and sent an explanation and apology, and we heard no more of the matter, and were still free to go to other caves along the coast.

Incidentally, we had rooms in the house of a man who was the chief baker of Port Patrick, and made excellent pigeon pies for us, though the number of birds his wife put into them was not always coincident with the number we handed over.

A Right and Left at Curlew

One day when we were in Connemara and driving along in a jaunting-car to the place from which we were to shoot snipe, we saw some curlew sitting on a small hill above the road and got out to stalk them, while the car moved on slowly. We did not succeed in getting within range before the birds rose, but two of them foolishly swung back on my right. I remembered that I had put in cartridges with No. 4 shot in them, and got a nice right and left. One of the birds fell into the car which was very convenient of it.

Many years ago, I went more than once with my brother-in-law flighting curlew on the saltings at the mouth of the Blackwater river. At first, we used to take a position in a creek at low tide, but this proved unsatisfactory, partly because the foothold was slippery and partly because we were washed out by the in-coming tide, just when most of the birds were flighting; so we evolved a better plan.

My brother-in-law's brother had a small yacht which he kept at Brightlingsea with a man in charge. We got this man to sink two barrels into the saltings near a big creek. In these we stayed comfortable and dry until the tide was right up; when the man came to fetch us in a small boat which could come right up the creek. He also helped to collect the birds.

On the first occasion we went, and as soon as we got into position, I shot a mallard which crossed behind me. Curiously enough, this was the only duck we ever saw in the flight. Curlew came in good numbers. I soon found out that it was useless to fire at them in front, as the shot glanced off their feathers, but they were easily killed behind, and we always made a fair bag.

After one such expedition we sailed in the yacht to Osea Island, as it had been arranged that we were to meet the brother there to shoot partridges of which there was a good stock. But somehow the brothers had botched the arrangement and the owner of the island did not turn up, to my great disappointment, as it was the only partridge shoot I was to have that year.

Since the last war, we have not had the big flocks of migrants that we used to get. A friend of mine shot over a hundred one year from his bathroom window with a .22 rifle, as they came to raid his Brussels sprouts. But in recent years he has seen and shot few of them. In some parts of the country, however, farmers still organise shoots to get rid of them, as they are very destructive to young seeds; so I suppose there are still big migrations in places. The price of pigeon in poulterers' shops shows that it is still, at times, profitable to shoot them, even when cartridges cost 6d. each or more.

(To be concluded next week)

Gundog News

(Continued from page 73)

all depends upon the individual puppy and its general demeanour and whether or not it is confident and has a will to please. Certainly all dogs, sooner or later, must be accustomed to the lead and it is as well to start them young. I use a lead for the early lessons in most cases, but where I am dealing with a really confident, biddable puppy which wants to please, I dispense with it for the sitting lessons or, if I do use it at all, do so very sparingly. The great thing is to make the pupil fond of and confident in you, and willing to stick around you. The self-willed, stubborn type which, the moment you start to apply any discipline runs off and stands at a safe distance with a "come-and-get-me-if-you-can" look in its eye will have to be taught with the lead. And possibly with the check cord, too.

Another reader, writing on the subject of general dog management, seems under the impression that gundogs should have some form of artificial heating in their kennels during the winter months. I consider this a great mistake, and the only times I would hear of heating a kennel would be during illness or when a bitch is whelping in very cold weather. Few people appreciate just how tough a dog is, and how much cold and wet it can withstand. In actual fact a dog can withstand a colossal amount of dry cold and, indeed, always seems better in health during very severe weather. If a dog gets very wet during cold weather, and has no means of drying itself fairly quickly, then trouble may ensue, but a good straw bed in a reasonable (unheated) kennel is all that is required to this end.

It is so stupid to pamper a gundog by heating its kennel or allowing it to spend most of its time roasting before a roaring fire, and then to take it out perhaps wildfowling, where it will have to sit or lie both cold and wet for hours on end. Just asking for trouble, in fact.

Most readers will have noticed how well and lively their dogs appear during a very cold spell, such as we had last winter, and how thick and glossy their coats became at such times. The dog is definitely a cold weather animal, and is never more miserable than when forced to lie in the sweltering heat of a summer's day without shade.

FIELD TRIALS

The Midland Counties Field Trial Society held spaniel trials at Milton Park, near Peterborough, on January 1 and 2, when the judges were Messrs. A. E. Curtis and Reg Hill.

Open Springer Stake. 1, Mr. R. W. Madgwick's Breckonhill Brando (K Erlandson); 2, Mr. R. B. Weston-Webb's Meadowcourt Mistress; 3, Dr. J. H. Gann's F.T.Ch. Harpersbrook Sammy (K. Chudley); 4, Dr. Davidson's Jonkit Jess. Reserve, Mr. Bowlby's Bryanston Bess (K. Chudley). Open Cocker Stake. Lt.-Cdr. E. Collard's Black Buoy of Eland (J. Forbes); 2, Major Peacock's Greatford Tipsy; 3, Mr. W. G. Fiske's Debdenhall Timothy (J. Wylie). Reserve, Lady Portarlington's Winyvil Tummel (K. Chudley).

Fisherman's Diary

by Coridon

SALMON and trout anglers are not keenly interested in records, and it is doubtful if one out of fifty such anglers accosted on the river bank could tell you the weights of the British rod caught record salmon, sea-trout, or brown trout. Nor is there any reason why he should have this knowledge, and the accoster, if he interrupted the fishing, might deservedly go away with a British record flea in his ear.

Coarse fish and sea fish records are in a slightly different category. Twenty years ago they were a matter of interest. Today they govern the awards of rods, reels and tackle, made weekly or at the end of the season by a number of newspapers and periodicals. In the aggregate the prizes account for several hundreds of pounds. The journals concerned make their own rules and use what record lists they care to choose, but the angler who catches a near-record fish finds himself in something of a quandary, for there is now no official list of records for coarse fish.

Angling and *The Angler's News* maintained such lists, but both journals have succumbed to economic circumstances. *The Field* publishes a list in "Where to Fish," but a gap of two years between one list and the next can put this out of date. *The Angling Times* maintains a record list of fresh and saltwater fish, but a form of *habeas corpus* is insisted upon for record fish—the body must be produced. This means that a well-authenticated record fish such as the 5lb. 11½oz. flounder caught about a year ago at Fowey is accepted by the National Federation of Sea Anglers (the official body for sea records) but not by *The Angling Times*.

Thus a sea angler who catches, say, a 4lb. flounder and enters it for a newspaper big-fish award must take his chance on whether the paper concerned regards the flounder record as 4lb. 13oz. or 5lb. 11½oz.—a very considerable difference when the value of fish for competition purposes is judged on the basis of their percentage of the record.

There is a solution, but it cannot be condensed into reasonably short space for these notes. Anyone interested in the subject would do well to read the critical and analytical article on the subject by Mr. E. Marshall Hardy (late Editor of *Angling*) published in *Angler's Annual, 1957*.

Big Tench

The accepted record tench is an 8½-pounder caught in the Leicester Canal in 1950. It is no reflection on the captor of this fine specimen to say that there is a general opinion among tench anglers that many bigger tench than this are swimming about in the waters of the British Isles. Tench are retiring fish, but occasionally one can see, in the right localities, some real monsters rolling at the surface.

Back in 1933 the Rev. E. E. Alston caught the record rudd (4½lb.) from a mere near Thetford. A few years earlier he had stocked the mere with rudd up to 1lb. and tench up to 3lb. Describing the capture of his rudd, Mr. Alston wrote (in "The Fisherman's Bedside Book"): "I used to see some monster tench in Ring Mere when I was fishing for rudd. Some were very big, from 7lb. to 10lb. I caught one of them, a seven-pounder . . . and this fish was one of the *smaller* ones that I saw." Mr. Alston, who now lives near that famous pike water, Lough Nafooey, probably knows as much about big fish and fishing as any man, and his judgment can be trusted.

There are many tench waters in England that have never been fully exploited; and some lakes in Co. Westmeath, Southern Ireland, produced many of the specimen tench recorded in *The Angler's News* Notable Fish List. It is thought that these lakes hold record-breakers, and I understand that next June the Tenchfishers—a small group of specialist tench anglers who exchange facts and theories about those fish—intend to fish one or more of these Irish lakes with, possibly, a new record in mind.

Piscator and His Petrol

Fuel restrictions have already hit those thousands of coarse-fish anglers who rely week after week upon coaches—usually hired by their clubs—to convey them to their fishing waters. Restrictions will almost certainly continue until the end of the coarse-fishing season on March 14, though it is possible that conditions may be easier when the season re-opens on June 16.

Much of our trout fishing water opens in March and the season is in full swing by the end of April, but the most optimistic forecaster would hesitate to predict that there will be any increase in the ration by the beginning of May.

The very nature of the fishing makes it inadvisable for thirty or forty anglers to go by coach to one destination, even if a coach can be hired, and it is the private car that usually takes an angler to his trout water. One imagines the ardent trout fisherman hoarding his petrol coupons with miserly glee against the season's opening, but except for a fortunate few the demands of family and business will prevent much saving.

Will the train again come into its own as an angler's conveyance? If so we may read again the stories that begin—as did so many in the angling papers of the 1890s and 1900s—"We left the station and tramped the six miles to the river in a persistent drizzle, arriving on the bankside by 8.30 a.m." If it did no more, it might improve some sluggish livers.

Danubian Catfish

It is not often that Danubian catfish appear in the British angling lists, but a specimen weighing over 32lb. was caught last year in one of the Claydon Park lakes in Buckinghamshire—and returned to the water. Apart from the scarcity of the species this fish was noteworthy for its size. Such a weight would be a minor matter in the waters of eastern Europe, where hundred-pound catfish are not unusual, but it appears to be the heaviest yet caught on rod and line in England.

Danubian catfish were brought to England several years ago and installed in one or two of the lakes in Woburn Park by the Duke of Bedford. About five years ago a few of these, or their descendants, were taken to the Claydon Park lakes.

It is unlikely that Ministerial approval would now be given for the introduction of fresh stocks of catfish from Europe, but home supplies seem to be flourishing. The fish are breeding at Woburn and Claydon. River Board authority has to be obtained for any transfer of fish from one water to another, and it may be that no other lakes will be stocked with catfish. They do not seem to do much harm, but their sporting value is negligible and it seems rather pointless to widen their range.

Bird Season

Except in places where bailiffs keep almost constant watch, or electric devices are installed to count the passing salmon, it is difficult to assess fish populations or to say whether the "hatch" of the year has been a good or a bad one. Birds have no water cover and it is easily possible for amateurs in bird study to say whether their breeding season has been successful.

I do not know what happened over England as a whole, but in my little patch of it birds last year raised successfully more broods than I can recall since I came here. All the "regulars" — blackbirds, thrushes, swallows, martins, hedge-sparrows, wrens, chaffinches and goldfinches did exceptionally well, but I have also had unexpected families of whitethroats, willow warblers, chiffchaffs and yellowhammers.

I started this note with that curious and likeable bird, the dipper, in mind. On the little local stream they are generally in evidence, but so far they have never nested in the immediate area. Last year a pair built a nest on the top of the arch under the bridge. The stream is a very small one, but the bridge is long, for it crosses diagonally, and the nest was sited some 20ft. from each end. I never tire of watching dippers walking under water, but apparently the youngsters have to be trained or persuaded to this exercise, for so far I have seen only the parent birds gathering river-bed food in this way, though the young ones swim and dive quite readily.

The solitary heron that patrols the water regularly must have made a good killing last year, for small trout swarm without protection in the shallow pools.

Kingfishers come occasionally upon marauding expeditions into the waters I know well, though they nest outside my province—but a family of dippers is more than adequate compensation.

Partridge Farming for the Small Shoot

(Continued from page 63)

to make this up to 60, leaving dummy eggs in the nest until you could replace them with eggs from your pairs. Given time these pairs should average 35/40 eggs each and some may lay as many as 60/70!

You can now start your cycle again with double the eggs of the previous year, but if you have had good luck it might easily be treble the number or more.

The releasing tecnhique should be as in my previous article.

There are snags as you can see, but anyone who wants to try it can be assured of the fullest co-operation from I.C.I. Game Research Station. Why not have a go at it and let us know how you get on?

Great Morning

(Continued from page 64)

and shoot the duck if we wished and he would join us! So all ended happily.

Two mornings later Tom and I went back (the Doctor having gone south) and again we set our ambush, this time moving our hides close to the rushing river. Whether the geese remembered the painful welcome they had received previously I do not know, but they did not come in the big skeins, only a few small parties, but the shooting was good and I had four more geese and Tom one. The duck never showed up save a couple of goldeneye which Tom downed with one shot as they whizzed past him up the river.

Our kind host joined us later and after the flight was over we went back to his charming house among its beech trees and terraced gardens and fought our battles over again. A happy ending to what might have been an uncomfortable episode.

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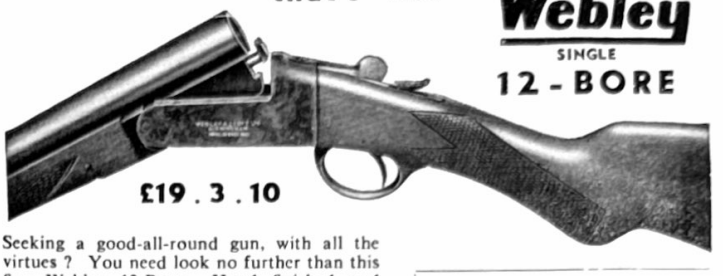

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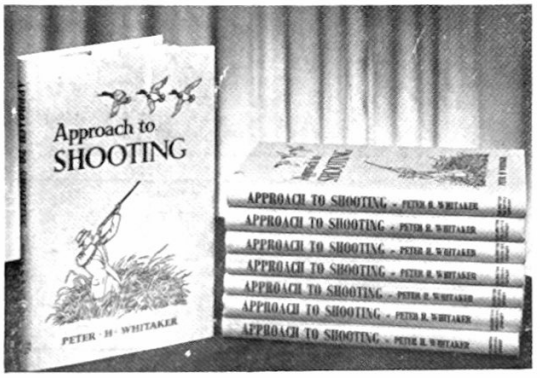

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